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Denis Diderot

Collected Works



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DENIS DIDEROT

(1713-1784)



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The Delphi Classics Catalogue



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DELPHI CLASSICS

The Collected Works of

DENIS DIDEROT



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Collected Works of Denis Diderot

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DELPHI CLASSICS

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The Novels



Langres, Champagne, in the region of Grand Est, France — Denis Diderot's birthplace



9 de la place, Langres — the birthplace (pictured to the right)



Statue of Diderot in Langres

The Indiscreet Toys (1748)

Anonymous translation, 1749

Original French Title: 'Les Bijoux indiscrets'

The French philosopher, art critic and writer, best known for serving as co-founder, chief editor, and contributor to the *Encyclopédie*, Denis Diderot was a prominent figure of the Age of Enlightenment. He initially studied philosophy at a Jesuit college, then considered working in the church clergy, before briefly studying law. In 1734 he decided to become a writer, which resulted in his father disowning him. For the next ten years, he enjoyed a bohemian lifestyle, when he wrote many of his best-known works in both fiction and non-fiction, including the anonymously published novel *Les Bijoux indiscrets* (1748).

At the time, Diderot desperately needed to raise funds on short notice. He had become a father through his wife, while his mistress Mme. de Puisieux was making financial demands from him. Diderot had stated to his mistress that writing a novel was a "trivial task", whereupon she challenged him to write a novel. *Les Bijoux indiscrets* was his response. It is largely inspired by the style of *Le Sopha, conte moral* (1742), a libertine novel by Claude Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon. That story concerns a young courtier, Amanzéï, whose soul in a previous life was condemned by Brahma to inhabit a series of sofas, and not to be reincarnated in a human body until two virgin lovers had consummated their passion upon the sofa he "inhabited." The novel is structured as a frame story in an oriental setting, explicitly evocative of the *Arabian Nights*, in which Amanzéï recounts the

adventures of seven couples, which he witnessed in his sofa form, to the bored sultan Shah Baham (grandson of Shehryār and Scheherazade).

Les Bijoux indiscrets serves as an allegory that portrays Louis XV of France as Mangogul, Sultan of Congo, who owns a magic ring that makes women's vaginas (toys or 'jewels') talk. The character of Mirzoza represents Louis XV's mistress Madame de Pompadour. In total, the ring is pointed at thirty different women in the narrative — usually at a dinner or a social meeting — with the Sultan typically being visible to the woman. However, as the ring has the additional property of making its owner invisible when required, a few of the sexual experiences recounted are through direct observation with the Sultan making himself invisible and placing his person in the unsuspecting woman's boudoir.

Diderot actually portrays Pompadour in a flattering light, most likely to ensure her support for the publication of his groundbreaking *Encyclopédie* project. Besides the inevitable bawdiness of the novel, there are several digressions into philosophy, music and literature. In one famous philosophical digression, the Sultan has a dream in which he sees a child named "Experiment" growing bigger and stronger till it demolishes an ancient temple named "Hypothesis". The book proved to be lucrative for Diderot, even though it could only be sold clandestinely. Today, it is Diderot's most published work.



Portrait of Louis XV by Louis-Michel van Loo, c. 1763

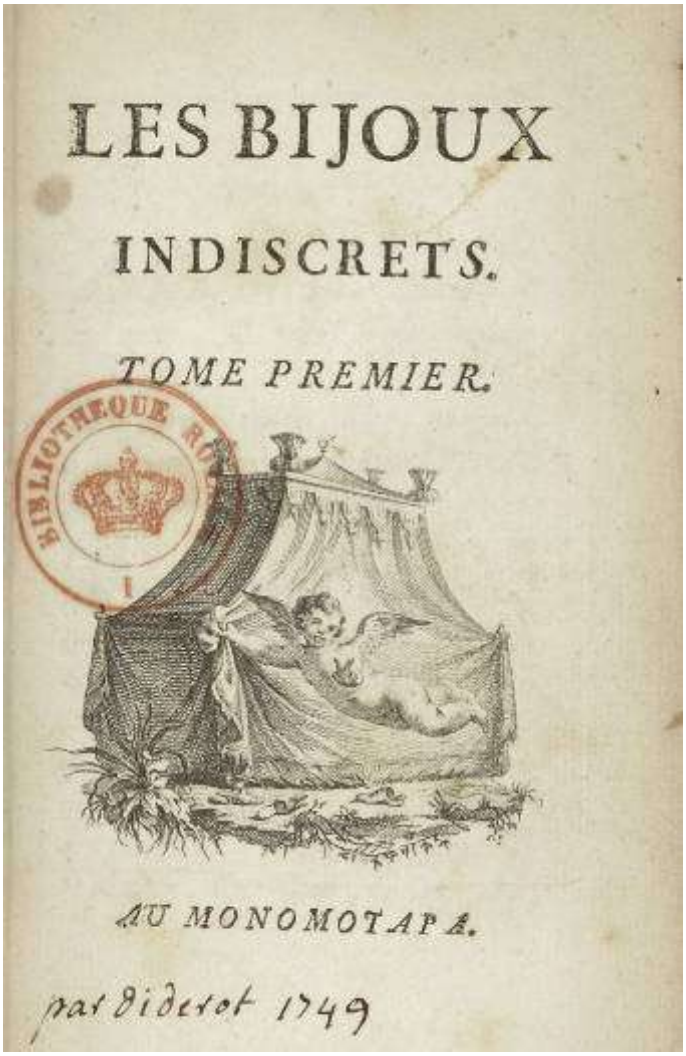


Portrait of Madame de Pompadour by Charles-André van Loo, c.1755 — Jeanne Poisson was a member of the French court and the official chief mistress of King Louis XV from 1745 to 1751; she remained influential as court favourite until her death.

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The first edition's title page



The original frontispiece for this translation: Imagination takes the feather from the hand of folly, and love dictates.

TO ZIMA.



ZIMA, EMBRACE THE moment. The Aga Narkis entertains your mother, and your governess is upon the watch in a balcony for your father's return: take, read, fear nothing. But even tho' the *Bijoux indiscrets* should be found behind your toilet, do you think it would be a matter of wonder? No, Zima, no; it is well known, that the *Sopha*, the *Tanzai*, and the *Confessions* have been under your pillow. Do you hesitate still? Know then, that Aglaé has not disdained to set her hand to the work, which you blush to accept. "Aglaé," say you, "the sober Aglaé!" — The same. While Zima was straying with, or perhaps contriving how to get rid of the young Bonza Alleluia; Aglaé amused herself innocently, by relating to me the adventures of Zaide, Alphana, Fannia, &c. — furnished me with the few strokes, which please me in the history of Mangogul, revised it, and pointed me out the means of making it better: for if Aglaé is one of the most virtuous and least edifying women in Congo; she is likewise one of the least jealous of wit, and one of the most witty. Can Zima now think, that it becomes her to play the scrupulous? Once more, Zima, take, read, read all; even without excepting the narrative of the *Rambling Toy*, which may be interpreted to you, without any expence to your virtue, provided the interpreter be neither your spiritual director nor your lover.

CHAP. I. Birth of Mangogul.



HIAOUF ZELES TANZAI had already reigned long in great Chechianea, and this voluptuous prince still continued to be the delight of his subjects. Acajou king of Minutia had undergone the fate predicted by his father: Zulmis was no more: the Count De —— was still living: Splendidus, Angola, Misapouf and some other potentates of the Indies and Asia were carried off by sudden deaths. The people tired of obeying weak sovereigns, had shaken off the yoke of their posterity; and the descendants of those unfortunate monarchs rambled unknown, or not regarded, in the provinces of their empires. The grandson of the illustrious Scheherazad was the only one who maintain'd his throne: and he was obeyed in Indostan by the name of Schach Baam, at the time when Mangogul was born in Congo. Thus it appears, that the death of several sovereigns was the mournful epoch of his birth.

His father Erguebzed did not summon the Fairies round the cradle of his son; because he had observed, that most of the princes of his time, who had been educated by these female intelligences, were no better than fools. He contented himself with ordering his nativity to be calculated by one Codindo, a person fitter for a portrait than an acquaintance.

Codindo, was head of the college of Soothsayers at Banza, the ancient capital of the empire. Erguebzed had settled a large pension on him, and had granted to him and his descendants, on account of the merit of their great uncle, who was an excellent cook, a magnificent castle on the frontiers of Congo. Codindo was appointed to observe the flight of birds, and the state of the heavens, and to make a report thereof at court: which office he executed very indifferently. If it be true, that they had at Banza the best

theatrical pieces, and the worst play-houses in all Africa; in return they had the most beautiful college in the world, and the most wretched predictions.

Codindo, informed of the business for which he was summoned to Erguebzed's palace, set out much embarrassed; for the poor man could no more read the stars than you or I. He was expected with impatience. The principal lords of the court were assembled in the appartment of the great Sultana. The ladies, magnificently dress'd, stood round the infant's cradle. The courtiers were hurrying to congratulate with Erguebzed on the great things, which he was undoubtedly on the point of hearing concerning his son. Erguebzed was a father, and thought it quite natural, to discern in the unform'd lines of an infant, what he was to be. In fine, Codindo arrived. "Draw near," says Erguebzed to him: "as soon as heaven had granted me the prince before you, I ordered the instant of his birth to be exactly registered, and without doubt you have been informed of it. Speak sincerely to your Master, and tell him boldly the destiny which heaven has reserved for his Son."

"Most magnanimous Sultan," answered Codindo, "the prince, born of parents equally illustrious and happy, can have no other than a great and fortunate destiny: but I should impose on your highness, if I plumed myself with a science which I do not possess. The stars rise and set for me as for the rest of mankind; and I am not more enlightened in futurity by their means, than the most ignorant of your subjects."

"But," replied the Sultan, "are you not an astrologer?" "Magnanimous prince," answered Codindo, "I have not that honour."

"What the devil are you then?" says the old, but passionate Erguebzed. "An Aruspex! By the heavens I did not imagine, that you had so much as thought of it. Believe me, Seigneur Codindo, suffer your poultry to feed in quiet, and pronounce on the fate of my son, as you lately did on the cold of my wife's parrot."

Codindo immediately drew a glass out of his pocket, took the infant's left ear, rubb'd his eyes, turn'd his spectacles again and again, peep'd at that ear, did the like to the right ear, and pronounced, "that the young prince's reign would be happy, if it proved long."

"I understand you," replied Erguebzed: "my son will do the finest things in the world, if he has time. But, zounds! what I want to have told me is, that he will have time. What matter is it to me, after he is dead, that he would have been the greatest prince upon earth, had he lived. I have sent for you to cast my son's horoscope, and you make me his funeral oration."

Codindo assured the prince, that he was sorry he was not more knowing; but beseeched his highness to consider, that his knowledge was sufficient for the little time he had been a conjurer. In effect, the moment before, what was Codindo?

CHAP. II. Education of Mangogul.



I WILL PASS lightly over Mangogul's first years. The infancy of princes is the same with that of the rest of mankind; with this difference, however, that princes have the gift of saying a thousand pretty things, before they can speak. Thus before Erguebzed's son was full four years old, he furnished matter for a volume of Mangogulana. Erguebzed, who was a man of sense, and was resolved that his son's education should not be so much neglected as his own had been, sent betimes for all the great men in Congo; as, painters, philosophers, poets, musicians, architects, masters of dancing, mathematicks, history, fencing, &c. Thanks to the happy dispositions of Mangogul, and to the constant lessons of his masters, he was ignorant in nothing of what a young prince is wont to learn the first fifteen years of his life; and at the age of twenty he could eat, drink, and sleep, as completely as any potentate of his age.

Erguebzed, whose weight of years began to make him feel the weight of his crown, tired with holding the reins of the empire, frighted at the disturbances which threatened it, full of confidence in the superior qualifications of Mangogul, and urged by sentiments of religion, sure prognostics of the approaching death or imbecility of the great, descended from the throne, to seat his son thereon: and this good prince thought he was under an obligation of expiating, by a retirement, the crimes of the most just administration, of which there is any account in the annals of Congo.

Thus it was, that in the year of the world 15,000,000,032,000,021, of the empire of Congo 390,000,070,003, began the reign of Mangogul, the 1,234,500 of his race in a direct line. Frequent conferences with his ministers, wars carried on, and the management of affairs, taught him in a

very short time what remained for him to know at getting out of the hands of his pedagogues; and that was somewhat.

However, in less than ten years Mangogul acquired the reputation of a great man. He gained battles, stormed towns, enlarged his empire, quieted his provinces, repaired the disorder of his finances, restored arts and sciences, raised edifices, immortalized himself by useful establishments, strengthened and corrected the legislative power, even founded academies; and, what his university could never comprehend, he executed all these great things, without knowing one word of Latin.

Mangogul was not less amiable in his Seraglio than great on the throne. He did not take it into his head to regulate his conduct by the ridiculous customs of his country. He broke the gates of the palaces inhabited by his women; he drove out those injurious guards of their virtue; he prudently confided in themselves for their fidelity: the entrance into their appartments was as free for men as into those of the canonesses of Flanders; and doubtless their behaviour as decent. Oh! how good a Sultan he was! There never was his equal, but in some French romance. He was mild, affable, chearful, gallant, of a charming figure, a lover of pleasures, cut out for them, and contained more wit and sense in his head, than had been in those of all his predecessors put together.

'Tis easy to judge that, with such uncommon merit, a number of the sex aspired to make him their conquest: Some few succeeded. Those who miss'd his heart, endeavour'd to console themselves with the grandees of the court. Young Mirzoza was of the number of the former. I shall not amuse myself with detailing the qualities and charms of Mirzoza: the work would be without end, and I am resolved that this history shall have one.

CHAP. III. Which may be regarded as the first of this history.



MIRZOZA HAD ALREADY fixed Mangogul for some years. These lovers had said, and a thousand times repeated, all that a violent passion suggests to persons who have the most wit. They were got as far as confidences, and they would impute it to themselves as a crime, to conceal the most minute circumstance of their lives from each other. These singular suppositions, “If heaven, which has placed me on the throne, had given me an obscure low birth, would you have deign’d to descend down to me, would Mirzoza have crown’d me?” “Should Mirzoza happen to lose the few charms which she is thought to have, would Mangogul love her still?” These suppositions, I say, which exercise the fancy of ingenious lovers, which sometimes make tender lovers quarrel, and frequently oblige the most sincere lovers to tell untruths, were quite worn out between our pair.

The favorite, who possess’d in a supreme degree, the necessary and uncommon talent of making a good narrative, had drained the scandalous history of Banza. As she had not the best constitution, she was not always disposed to receive the Sultan’s caresses, nor he always in the humour of offering them. In short, there were some days, in which Mangogul and Mirzoza had little to say, hardly any thing to do, and in which, without any diminution of love, they amused themselves but indifferently. Those days were rare indeed, but there were some; and this was one of them.

The Sultan was carelessly stretch’d on a sopha, opposite to the favorite, who was knotting in silence. The weather did not permit them to take a walk. Mangogul would not venture to propose a party of piquet; and this posture had lasted near a quarter of an hour, when the Sultan, yawning several times, said, “It must be allowed, that Geliotta sung like an angel.” “And that your highness is tired to death,” answered the favorite. “No,

Madam," replied Mangogul, endeavouring to smother a yawn, "the minute that one sees you, is not that of tiresomeness." "If that is not a polite compliment, 'tis no body's fault but your own," rejoin'd Mirzoza: "but you ponder, you are absent, you yawn. Prince, what ails you?" "I know not," said the Sultan. "But I guess," continued the favorite. "I was eighteen, when I had the good fortune to please you. It is full four years since you began to love me. Eighteen and four make twenty-two. Therefore I am now very old." Mangogul smiled at this calculation. "But if I am no longer worth any thing for pleasure," added Mirzoza, "I will at least demonstrate that I am very good for advice. The variety of amusements which attend you, has not been able to secure you against disgust. You are disgusted. Prince, there is your disease." "I do not allow, that you have hit it off," says Mangogul: "but supposing you have, do you know a remedy?" Mirzoza answered the Sultan, after a moment's pause, that his highness seem'd to take so much pleasure at the narratives she made him of the gallantries of the town, that she was sorry she had no more to relate to him, or that she was not better informed of those of the court; that she would have tried that expedient, till she thought of somewhat better. "I think it a good one," says Mangogul: "But who knows the stories of all those fools; and tho' they were known to any, who could relate them like you?" "Let us learn them however," replied Mirzoza. "Whosoever it be that tells them, I am certain that your highness will gain more by the matter, than you will lose by the form." "I shall join with you, if you please, in fancying the adventures of the court ladies very diverting," says Mangogul: "but tho' they were to be a hundred times more so, what does that avail, if it be impossible to come at them?" "There may be a difficulty in it," answers Mirzoza, "but in my opinion, that is all. The Genius Cucufa, your relation and friend, has done greater things. Why do you not consult him?" "Ah, joy of my heart!" cried the Sultan, "you are an admirable Creature. I make no doubt but the Genius will employ all his

power in my favour. This moment I shut myself up in my closet, and invoke him.”

Accordingly Mangogul arose, kissed the favorite on the left eye, pursuant to the custom of Congo, and departed.



Evocation of the Genius.

CHAP. IV. Evocation of the Genius.



THE GENIUS CUCUFA is an old hypochondriac, who fearing lest the concerns of the world, and dealings with the rest of the genii, might prove an obstacle to his salvation, took refuge in the Void; in order to employ himself quite at leisure on the infinite perfections of the great Pagoda, to pinch, scratch and make notches in his flesh, to fret himself into madness, and starve himself to death. In that place he lies on a straw mat, his body tuck'd up in a sack, his flanks squeez'd with a cord, his arms crossed on his breast, and his head sunk into a hood, which suffers nothing to issue but the end of his beard. He sleeps, but one would think him in contemplation. All his company is an owl which nods at his feet, some rats which gnaw his mat, and bats which hover round his head. The manner of evoking him, is, by repeating, to the sound of a bell, the first verse of the nocturnal office of the Bramins: then he lifts up his hood, rubs his eyes, puts on his sandals, and sets out. Figure to yourself an old Camaldolian Monk carried in the air by two large horn-owls, which he holds by the legs. In this equipage it was, that Cucufa appear'd to the Sultan. "May the blessing of Brama be within these walls," says he, bowing. "Amen," answered the prince. "What do you want, my son?" "A very small matter," says Mangogul; "to procure me some pleasure at the expence of the court ladies." "Oh, my son!" replied Cucufa, "you have a larger appetite than a whole monastery of Bramins. What do you pretend to do with this troop of extravagants?" "To learn from themselves their present and past adventures, that is all." "But that is impossible," says the Genius. "To have women confess their adventures, is a thing that never was, nor ever will be." "Yet it must be," added the Sultan. At these words, the Genius scratching his ear, and combing his long beard with his fingers, fell to thinking. His meditation was short. "My child," said

he to Mangogul, “I love you, you shall be satisfied.” Instantly he plunged his right hand into a deep pocket made under his arm-pit on the left side of his frock, and, together with images, bless’d beads, little leaden pagoda’s, and musty sweatmeats, drew out a silver ring, which Mangogul at first took for one of St. Hubert’s rings. “You see this ring,” said he to the Sultan, “put it on your finger, my child: every woman, at whom you shall level the stone, will relate her intrigues in a plain, audible voice. Do not imagine however, that ’tis by the mouth that they are to speak.” “By what then will they speak?” says Mangogul. “By the frankest part about them, and the best instructed in those things which you desire to know,” says Cucufa; “by their Toys.” “By their Toys,” replies Mangogul bursting into laughter; “that is particular. Talking Toys! That is an unheard extravagance.” “My son,” said the Genius, “I have performed many greater prodigies for your grandfather: therefore depend on my word. Go, and may Brama bless you. Make a good use of your secret, and remember that there are ill-placed curiosities.” This said, the old hypocrite nodded his head, pull’d his hood over his face, took his horn-owls by the legs, and vanish’d in the air.

CHAP. V. Mangogul's dangerous Temptation.



SCARCELY WAS MANGOGUL in possession of Cucufa's mysterious ring, when he was tempted to make the first trial of it on the favorite. I forgot to mention, that besides the vertue of obliging the Toys of those women, on whom he turn'd the stone, to speak, it had that also of rendering the person invisible, who wore it on the little finger. Thus could Mangogul transport himself in the twinkling of an eye to a thousand places where he was not expected, and with his own eyes see many things, which are frequently transacted without witnesses. He had nothing more to do than to put on his ring, and say "I desire to be in such a place," and he was there in an instant. Behold him then in Mirzoza's bed-chamber.

Mirzoza, who gave over all hopes of the Sultan's company, was in bed. Mangogul approach'd her pillow softly, and saw by the glimmering light of a night taper, that she was asleep. "Good," say he, "she sleeps, let us quickly shift the ring on another finger, resume our natural shape, turn the stone on this fair sleeper, and awake her Toy a little while. — But what stops me? — I tremble. — Is it possible that Mirzoza? — No, it is not possible, Mirzoza is faithful to me. Fly from me, injurious suspicions, I will not, I ought not to heed ye." He said, and put his fingers on the ring: but taking them off as hastily as if it had been fire, he cried within himself. "What do I do, wretched man! I insult Cucufa's advice. For the sake of satisfying a silly curiosity, I am going to run the hazard of losing my mistress and my life. If her Toy should be in the humor of talking extravagantly, I should never see her more, and I should dye of grief. And who knows what a Toy may have in its soul?" Mangogul's agitation made him in some measure forget himself: he pronounced these last words pretty loud, and the favorite awoke. "Ah, Prince," said she, less surprized than

charmed at his presence, “you are here. Why did you not send me notice? Must you condescend to wait for my awaking?”

Mangogul answered the favorite by relating the success of his interview with Cucufa, shew’d her the ring, and did not conceal one of its properties from her. “Ah! what a diabolical secret has he given you!” cry’d Mirzoza. “But pray, Prince, do you intend to make any use of it.” “How,” said the Sultan, “do I intend to use it? I shall begin by you, if you argue with me.” At these terrible words the favorite turn’d pale, trembled, recover’d herself, and conjured the Sultan by Brama, and all the Pagoda’s of the Indies and Congo, not to try the experiment on her of a secret power, which indicated a diffidence of her fidelity. “If I have been constantly honest,” continued she, “my Toy will not speak a word, and you will have done me such an injury as I shall never forgive. If it happens to speak, I shall lose your esteem and heart, and that will make you run distracted. Hitherto you have, in my opinion, found your account in our connection; why would you run the risk of breaking it off? Prince, believe me. Follow the advice of the Genius; he has had great experience, and advices of Genius are always good to follow.”

“This is exactly what I was saying to myself,” answered Mangogul, “when you awoke. And yet if you had slept two minutes longer, I cannot answer for what might have happened.”

“What would have happened,” says Mirzoza, “is, that my Toy would have given you no information, and that you would have lost me for ever.”

“That may be,” replied Mangogul; “but now that I have a full view of the danger which I incurred, I solemnly swear to you by the eternal Pagoda, that you shall be excepted from the number of those, on whom I shall turn the ring.”

At these words Mirzoza brightened up, and fell to joking at the expence of the Toys which the Prince should hereafter interrogate. “Cydalisa’s Toy,” said she, “has many stories to tell, and if it be as indiscreet as its mistress, it

will not require much intreaty. Haria's Toy is no longer of this world, and your highness will obtain no tales from it of fresher date than the days of my grandmother. As for that of Glauce, I believe it is a proper one to be consulted. She is a coquet and pretty." "And for that reason precisely it is," replied the Sultan, "that her Toy will be mute." "Why then," said the Sultana, "apply to that of Phedima, she is ugly, and loves gallantry." "Yes," continued the Sultan; "and so ugly, that one must be as ill-natured as you, to accuse her of gallantry. Phedima is sober; 'tis I who say it, and who know something of the matter." "As sober as you please," replied the favorite, "but she has a sort of grey eyes that speak the contrary." "Her eyes belye her," said the Sultan warmly. "You tire my patience with your Phedima. Might not one say, that there is no other Toy but this to examine." "But may I presume, without offending your highness," added Mirzoza, "to ask which is the first you intend to honour with your choice." "We shall see anon," said Mangogul, "in the circle of the Manimonbanda, (the Congese name of the great Sultana). We shall have a good deal of work upon our hands and when we happen to be tired of the Toys of my court, we may chance make a tour thro' Banza. Possibly we may find those of the city women more reasonable than those of dutchesses." "Prince," said Mirzoza, "I have some acquaintance with the former, and can assure you, that they are only more circumspect." "We shall soon hear from them: but I cannot refrain from laughter," continued Mangogul, "when I think on the confusion and surprize of these women at the first words of their Toys, ha, ha, ha! Remember, delight of my soul, that I shall expect you at the great Sultana's, and that I shall make no use of my ring till you are come." "Prince," said Mirzoza, "I rely on the promise you have made me." Mangogul smiled at her allarm, reiterated his promise, sealed them with kisses, and retired.

CHAP. VI. First Trial of the Ring.

Alcina.



MANGOGUL ARRIVED BEFORE her at the great Sultana's, and found all the ladies very busy at cards. He survey'd all those, whose reputation was established, fully resolved to try his ring on one of them, and his only difficulty was in the choice. While, he was in suspence by whom to begin, he spied a young lady of the household of the Manimonbanda in a window. She was toying with her husband; which appear'd singular to the Sultan, inasmuch as they had been married above eight days. They had made their appearance in the same box at the Opera, in the same coach at the Bois de Boulogne, they had finished their visits; and the fashion of the times exempted them from loving or even meeting each other. "If this Toy," says Mangogul, "is as silly as its mistress, we shall have a diverting soliloquy." At this instant the favorite appear'd. "Welcome," said the Sultan to her in a whisper. "I have cast my lead, waiting for you." "And on whom?" ask'd Mirzoza. "On that couple which you see sporting in that window," answer'd Mangogul with a wink. "Well set out," replied the favorite.

Alcina, for that was the young lady's name, was sprightly and pretty. The Sultan's court had few women more amiable, and not one of a gayer disposition. One of the Sultan's Emirs had filled his head with her. He was not left in ignorance of what the chronicle had published concerning Alcina: the report alarm'd him, but he followed the custom: he consulted his mistress about it. Alcina swore, that it was pure calumny invented by some coxcombs, who would have been silent, if they had had any reason for talking; but however, that there was no harm done, and that he was at full liberty to believe it or not, as he thought proper. This answer, delivered with

an air of confidence, convinced the amorous Emir of his mistress's innocence. He closed the affair, and assumed the title of Alcina's husband with all its prerogatives.

The Sultan levelled his ring at her. A loud burst of laughter, which seized Alcina at some comical saying of her husband, was suddenly cut short by the operation of the ring; and immediately a murmuring noise was heard under her petticoats. "Well, now I am titled. Truly I am glad on't. Nothing like having a rank. If my first advices had been heeded, I should have been provided with something better than an Emir: but yet an Emir is better than nothing." At these words all the ladies quitted the game, to seek from what quarter the voice issued. This movement made a great noise. "Silence," says Mangogul, "this deserves attention." They obeyed, and the Toy continued. "One would be apt to think, that a husband is a guest of great importance, by the precautions which are taken to receive him. What preparatives! What profusion of myrtle water! Another fortnight of this regimen would have demolished me. I had disappear'd, and the Emir might have sought lodgings elsewhere, or have shipped me off for the island Jonquille." Here my author says, that all the ladies grew pale, look'd at each other in deep silence, and grew vastly serious; which he ascribes to their fear, lest the conversation should grow warm, and become general. "Yet," continued Alcina's Toy, "in my opinion the Emir did neither require nor stand in need of so many formalities: but I must still acknowledge the prudence of my mistress. She guarded against the worst, and I was treated for the great lord as for his little page."

The Toy was on the point of continuing its extravagant harangue, when the Sultan, observing that this strange scene shock'd the modest Manimonbanda, interrupted the orator by turning off the ring. The Emir had vanish'd at the first words of his wife's Toy. Alcina, without being disconcerted, pretended to take a nap: mean while the ladies whispered that

she had the vapours. “Yes,” says a *Petit-maitre*, “ —— Vapours: Ch —— y calls them hysterics, as much as to say, things which come from the lower region. For this case he has a divine elixir; it is a principle, principiating, principiated, which revives —— which —— I will propose it to the lady.” The company laugh’d at this gibberish, and our Cynic resumed. “Nothing more true, ladies: I, who speak, have used it for a deperdition of substance.” “A deperdition of substance, good marquiss,” said a young person, “pray what is that?” “Madam,” replied the marquiss, “it is one of those casual accidents which happen —— but every body knows it.”

By this time the pretended drowziness went off. Alcina sat down to play with as much intrepidity as if her Toy either had not spoken a word, or had made the finest speech in the world. Nay, she was the only lady that play’d without distraction. This sitting was worth a considerable sum to her. The rest did not know what they were about, could not count the dots on the cards, forgot their reckonings, neglected their good luck, dealt wrong, and committed a hundred other mistakes, of which Alcina took the advantage. In fine, they broke up play, and every one withdrew.

This adventure made great noise not only at court and in town, but all over Congo. Epigrams were handed about on it. The discourse of Alcina’s Toy was published, revised, corrected, enlarged and commented by the Agreeables of the court. The Emir was lampoon’d, and his wife immortalized. She was pointed at in the play-house, and followed in the public walks. People flock’d about her, and she heard them buzzing: “Yes, ’tis she: her Toy made a discourse two hours long.” Alcina bore her new reputation with admirable tranquillity. She listened to these expressions, and many more, with a serenity, which the rest of the women could not shew. They were every moment under apprehensions of some indiscretions being committed by their Toys: but the adventure of the following chapter compleated their confusion.

As soon as the company had broke up, Mangogul gave his hand to the favorite, and conduced her to her appartment. She was far from having that lively chearful air, which seldom quitted her. She had lost considerably at play, and the effect of the dreadful ring had plunged her into a pensiveness, out of which she was not yet thoroughly recovered. She knew the Sultan's curiosity, and she had not sufficient confidence in the promises of a man less amorous than despotic, to be free from uneasiness. "What ails you, my soul's delight?" said Mangogul. "You are pensive." "I played with bad luck without example," answered Mirzoza. "I lost the possibility. I had twelve tableaux, and I don't think I mark'd three times." "That is vexatious," replied Mangogul; "but what think you of my secret?" "Prince," said the favorite, "I persist in deeming it diabolical. Doubtless it will amuse you, but that amusement will be attended with dismal consequences. You are going to spread discord in every family, undeceive husbands, throw lovers into despair, ruin wives, dishonour daughters, and raise a thousand other hurly-burlys. Ah! Prince, I conjure you. — —" "By the light," said Mangogul, "you moralize like Nicole! I would be glad to know why the concern for your neighbour touches you so to the quick. No, no, madam; I will keep my ring. And what do I matter those husbands undeceived, those lovers thrown into despair, those wives ruined, those daughters dishonoured, provided I amuse myself. Am I then a Sultan for nothing? Good night, madam, we must hope that future scenes will be more comic than the first, and that you will take more pleasure in them by degrees." "I do not believe it, sir," replied Mirzoza. "And for my part, I promise you, that you will find pleasant Toys, nay, so pleasant, that you cannot refuse giving them audience. And what would you do, if I sent them to you in quality of ambassadors? I will if you desire it, spare you the trouble of their harangues; but as to the recital of their adventures, you shall hear it either from their own mouths or mine. 'Tis a determined point; and I can abate

nothing of it. Resolve to familiarize yourself with these new speech-makers." At these words he embraced her, and went into his closet, reflecting on the trial he had made, and devoutly thanking the Genius Cucufa.

CHAP. VII. Second trial of the Ring.

The Altars.



THE NEXT EVENING there was to be a private supper in Mirzoza's appartment. The persons invited came early. Before the prodigy of the preceding day, people came by inclination; this night they came purely out of politeness. All the ladies had an air of constraint, and spoke in monosyllables. They were upon the watch, and expected every moment, that some Toy would join in conversation. Notwithstanding their itch of bringing Alcina's odd adventure on the carpet, none of them dared to undertake opening the topic. Not that they were restrained by her presence: tho' included in the supper-list, she did not appear; it was judged that she had a swimming in her head. However, whether it was that they became less apprehensive of danger, as the whole day long they had heard no body speak but from the mouth; or whether they affected to appear courageous, the conversation revived, the women most suspected composed their countenances, put on an air of assurance, and Mirzoza ask'd the courtier Zegris, if he knew any entertaining news. "Madam," replied Zegris, "you have been informed of a match between the Aga Chazour and young Siberina: I assure you it is broke off." "Upon what account?" interrupted the favorite. "On account of a strange voice," continued Zegris, "which Chazour says he heard at the toilet of his princess. Since yesterday, the Sultan's court is full of people, who go with their ears cock'd, in hopes of catching, I can't say how, such declarations, as most certainly the persons concerned have no inclination to make them."

"That is silly," replied the favorite. "Alcina's misfortune, if it be one, is far from being averred. We have not got to the bottom — —"

“Madam,” interrupted Zelmaida, “I have heard her most distinctly. She spoke without opening her mouth. The facts were well articulated, and it was not very difficult to guess whence this extraordinary sound issued. I assure you, that I should have died, were I in her place.”

“Died!” replied Zegris. “Folks survive other sorts of accidents.” “How?” cried Zelmaida. “Can there be a more dreadful one than the indiscretion of a Toy? Well, there is no medium left. One must either renounce gallantry, or resolve to pass for a woman of pleasure.” “Indeed,” said Mirzoza, “the option is severe.” “No, no, madam,” replied another lady, “you will see that women will fix their resolution. They will allow Toys to prate as much as they please; and will go their own way, without troubling themselves with what the world shall say. And after all, what does it signify, whether it be a woman’s Toy or her lover that proves indiscreet? Are things less exposed?”

“Upon a serious consideration of the whole affair,” continued a third, “if a woman’s adventures must be divulged, ’tis better it should happen by her Toy than her lover.”

“The notion is singular,” said the favorite; “and true,” replied she who had broach’d it: “for, pray, observe that a lover is generally dissatisfied, before he becomes indiscreet, and therefore tempted to be revenged by exaggerating every thing: whereas a Toy talks without passion, and adds nothing to the truth.”

“For my part,” said Zelmaida, “I am not of that opinion. In this case it is not so much the importance of the depositions, as the strength of the evidence, that ruins the criminal. A lover, who by his discourse dishonours the Altar, on which he has sacrificed, is a kind of impious person, who deserves no credit: but if the altar lifts up its voice, what answer can be made.”

“That the altar knows not what it says,” replied the second. Monima, hitherto mute, broke silence, in order to say in a dragging, lazy tone: “Ah!

let my Altar, since you call it so, speak or be silent, I fear nothing from its talk."

Mangogul enter'd that very instant, and Monima's last words did not escape him. He levell'd his Ring at her, and her Toy was heard to cry out: "Do not believe her, she lies." Her female neighbours, gazing at each other, ask'd whose Toy it was that made this answer. "'Tis not mine," said Zelmaida; "nor mine," said another; "nor mine," said Monima; "nor mine," said the Sultan. Every one, and the favorite among the rest, persisted in the negative.

The Sultan, taking the advantage of this incertainty, and addressing the ladies, said: "You have Altars then? Pray, how are they feasted?" As he was speaking, he nimbly turn'd his Ring successively on all the women except Mirzoza; and every one of their Toys answering in its turn, these words were heard in different tones. "I am frequented, batter'd, abandon'd, perfum'd, fatigu'd, ill serv'd, disgusted, &c." They all spoke their word, but so precipitately, that no just application could be made. Their jargon, sometimes rumbling, sometimes yelping, accompanied with loud laughs of Mangogul and his courtiers, made a noise of a new kind. The ladies agreed with a very grave air, that it was very diverting. "How," said the Sultan, "sure we are too happy, that the Toys deign to speak our language, and furnish half the expence of the conversation. Society must be a considerable gainer by this duplication of organs. Possibly we men shall speak also in our turn, by something else besides our mouths. Who knows? What agrees so perfectly well with Toys, may happen to be destin'd to make questions and responses to them: nevertheless my anatomist is of a different opinion."

CHAP. VIII. Third trial of the Ring.

The Private Supper.



SUPPER WAS SERVED up, the company sate down at table, and at first they diverted themselves at Monima's charge: all the women unanimously agreed that her Toy had spoke first; and she must have sunk under this confederacy, had not the Sultan taken her part. "I do not pretend," said he, "that Monima is less gallant than Zelmaida; but I believe her Toy has more discretion. Besides, when the mouth and Toy of a woman contradict each other, which to believe?" "Sir," replied a courtier, "I know not what Toys will say hereafter; but hitherto they have explain'd themselves on a subject, which is very familiar to them. As long as they shall have the prudence to speak of nothing but what they understand, I shall believe them as so many oracles." "Others," said Mirzoza, "of greater authenticity might be consulted." "Pray, madam," replied Mangogul, "what interest can these have in disguising the truth? Nothing but a chimæra of honour could be their motive: but a Toy has none of these chimæras. That is not the place of prejudices." "A chimera of honour," said Mirzoza, "prejudices! If your highness had been exposed to the same inconveniences with us, you would become sensible, that whatever touches virtue, is far from being chimærical." All the ladies, encouraged by the Sultana's answer, insisted that it was superfluous to put them to certain proofs; and Mangogul, that these proofs were generally dangerous at least.

This conversation ushered in the champagne: it moved briskly round, they plied it close, and it warmed the Toys. Then it was that Mangogul had intended to resume his frolicks. He turn'd his ring on a very gay sprightly young lady, who sate pretty near him, and directly opposite to her husband:

and immediately issued from under the table a plaintive noise, a weak languishing voice, which said: “Oh, how I am harrassed! I can bear it no longer, I am at death’s door.” “How, by the Pagoda Pongo Sabiam,” cried Husseim, “my wife’s Toy speaks, and what can it say?” “We are going to hear,” answered the Sultan. — — “Prince, you will permit me not to be of the number of its auditors,” replied Husseim; “for if any thing ridiculous drop’d from it, do you think?” — — “I think you are a fool,” said the Sultan, “to alarm yourself at the prattle of a Toy: do we not know a good part of what it can say, and may we not guess the rest? Sit down, then, and endeavour to divert yourself.”

Husseim sat down, and his wife’s Toy began to prate like a magpye. “Shall I eternally have this huge Flandrian Valanto? I have seen some who have made an end; but this man” —— At these words Husseim arose in a fury, snatch’d up a knife, sprang to the other side of the table; and would have pierced his wife’s breast, if his neighbours had not prevented him. “Husseim,” said the Sultan, “you make too much noise: the company cannot hear. Might not one say, that your wife’s Toy is the only one that has not common sense? And what would become of these ladies, if their husbands were of your humour? How! you are out of your wits for a pitiful little adventure of one Valanto, who never made an end. Return to your seat, behave like a man of honour; see that you watch yourself, and not commit a second failure before a prince, who admits you to his pleasures.”

While Husseim, stifling his rage, was leaning on the back of a chair, his eyes shut, and his hand on his forehead; the Sultan dexterously levell’d his Ring, and the Toy went on. “Valanto’s young page would suit me pretty well: but I know not when he will begin. In the mean time till the one begins, and the other makes an end, I practise patience with the Bramin Egon. He is a frightful figure, I must own: but his talent is to make an end and begin again. Oh, what a great man a Bramin is!”

By the time the Toy had got as far as this exclamation, Husseim blush'd to fret for a woman who was so unworthy, and fell a laughing with the rest of the company; but he kept something in reserve for his spouse. The entertainment being over, every one went home directly, except Husseim, who conducted his wife into a house of veiled maidens, and there shut her up. Mangogul being inform'd of her disgrace paid her a visit. He found the whole community busy in comforting her, but still more in trying to get the secret of her exile from her. "'Tis for a mere trifle," said she, "that I am here. Being last night at supper with the Sultan, the Champagne was whip'd about, the Tokay gallop'd, people hardly knew what they said, when my Toy must needs fall to prating. I do not remember on what subject it talk'd, but it made my husband take dudgeon."

"To be sure, Madam, he is in the wrong," replied the nuns: "people ought not to put themselves into such passions for trifles! —— How! your Toy has spoke. Pray does it speak still? How charm'd we should be to hear it! It must certainly express itself with wit and a good grace." They were gratified: for the Sultan turn'd his ring on the poor recluse, and her Toy thank'd them for their civilities; protesting to them at the same time, that how pleased soever it was with their company, that of a Bramin would suit it better.

The Sultan embraced the opportunity, to learn some particulars of the life of these virgins. His Ring interrogated the Toy of a young recluse, whose name was Cleanthis; and the pretended virgin-Toy confessed two gardeners, a Bramin, and three cavaliers; and related how by the assistance of a purging draught and two bleedings, she had escaped giving scandal. Zephirina owned, by the organ of her Toy, that she was indebted to the errand-boy of the house, for the honourable title of mother. But one thing that astonish'd the Sultan, was, that tho' those sequester'd Toys expressed themselves in very indecent terms; the virgins, to whom they belong'd,

heard them without blushing: which made him conjecture, that if they failed of the practical part in those retreats, they had in return a large share of speculation.

In order to clear up this point, he turn'd his ring on a novice between fifteen and sixteen years of age. "Flora," said her Toy, "has more than once ogled a young officer thro' the grate. I am certain that she had an inclination for him. Her little finger told me so." This was a mortifying stroke for Flora. The ancient ladies condemned her to two months silence and discipline; and ordered prayers, that the Toys of the community might remain mute.

CHAP. IX. The state of the academy of sciences at Banza.

MANGOGUL HAD SCARCELY quitted the recluses, among whom I left him, when a report was spread thro' Banza, that the virgins of the congregation of Brama's Coccyx, spoke by their Toys. This report, to which Husseim's violent proceedings had given credit, rouzed the curiosity of the learned. The phænomenon was thoroughly examined and allowed: and the freethinkers began to seek in the properties of matter, the reasons of a fact, which they had at first deemed impossible. The tattle of the Toys gave birth to a great number of excellent works; and this important subject swell'd the collections of the academies with several memoirs, which may be esteemed the utmost efforts of human understanding.

In order to model and perpetuate that of Banza, invitations with suitable encouragement had been, and still continued to be, given to all persons of the brightest parts in Congo, Monoémugi, Beleguanza, and the circumjacent kingdoms. It took in, under different titles, all those who had distinguished themselves in natural history, natural philosophy, mathematicks, and the greatest part of those, who promised to make a figure in them one time or other. This swarm of indefatigable bees labour'd incessantly in the research of truth, and every year the public reaped the fruits of their labours in a volume full of discoveries.

It was at that time divided into two factions, the one composed of Vorticists, and the other of Attractionists. Olibrio, an able geometrician and great natural philosopher, founded the sect of the Vorticists. Circino, an able natural philosopher and great geometrician, was the first Attractionist. Both Olibrio and Circino proposed to explain nature. Olibrio's principles have at first sight a certain air of simplicity, which seduces: in the gross they account for the principal phænomena, but they contradict themselves in the

detail. As for Circino, he seems to set out upon an absurdity; but 'tis the first step alone that is expensive. The minute details, which ruin Olibrio's system, establish his. He follows a road, dark at entrance, but which grows more lightsome according as a person advances. On the contrary, that of Olibrio, lightsome at entrance, grows darker and darker. The philosophy of the latter requires less study than understanding. One cannot be a disciple of the former, without a large share of understanding and study. One enters without preparation into Olibrio's school; every body has the key of it. That of Circino is open to none but geometricians of the first class. Olibrio's Vortices are within the reach of all capacities. Circino's central powers are made for first rate Algebraists only. Wherefore there will always be an hundred Vorticists for one Attractionist; and one Attractionist will always be worth an hundred Vorticists. Such was the state of the academy of sciences at Banza, when it handled the subject of the indiscreet Toys.

This phænomenon was very slippery: it dodged the attraction, and the subtile matter could not come within reach of it. In vain did the president summon all those who had any notions, to communicate them: a profound silence reigned in the assembly. At length Persiflo the Vorticist, who had published treatises on many subjects, which he did not understand, rose up and said: "The fact, gentlemen, might well agree with the system of the world. I should suspect that it has in general the same cause with the tides. For pray take notice, that this day is the equinoctial full moon. But before I can depend on my conjecture, I must wait to hear what the Toys will say next month."

The company shrug'd their shoulders: they dared not remonstrate to him, that he reasoned like a Toy; but as he is a man of penetration he perceived in an instant that they thought as much.

The Attractionist Reciproco opened, and said: "Gentlemen, I have tables calculated by a theory on the highth of the tides in every port of the

kingdom. True it is, that observations somewhat bely my calculations: but I flatter myself that this small inconvenience will be repaired by the advantage that will result from them, if the tattle of Toys continues to square with the phænomena of the ebb and flow."

A third person started up, went to the board, traced his figure, and said "let a Toy be A B, and — —"

Here the ignorance of the translators has deprived us of a demonstration, which without doubt the African author had preserv'd. After a blank of about two pages, we read: Reciproco's reasoning was thought demonstrative; and it was unanimously agreed, from the essays he had given on dialectics, that he would be able one day or other to make this deduction: women have from time immemorial heard with their ears: therefore they ought at this day to speak by their Toys.

Doctor Orcotomus, of the tribe of Anatomists, spoke next, and said: "Gentlemen, I am of opinion, that it would be properer to drop a phænomenon, than to seek its cause in vapory hypotheses. For my part, I would not have open'd my mouth, if I had nought but trifling conjectures to offer: but I have examined, studied, meditated. I have seen Toys in the paroxysm, and I am got so far, by means of my knowledge of the parts, and experience, as to be convinced, that that which in Greek we call Delphys, has all the properties of the windpipe, and that there are some who can speak as well by the Toy as by the mouth. Yes, gentlemen, the Delphys is a string and wind instrument; but much more a string than a wind one. The outward air, which lights on it, properly does the office of a bow on the tendinous fibres of the wings, which I shall call ribbons or vocal strings. The gentle collision of this air and the vocal strings puts them into a trembling motion; and it is by their quicker or slower vibrations, that they utter different sounds. The person modifies these sounds at discretion, speaks, and even might sing.

“As there are but two ribbons or vocal strings, and as they are to the eye of equal length, it will doubtless be ask’d, how they suffice to give the multitude of sounds, grave and acute, strong and weak, of which the human voice is capable. I answer, in pursuing the comparison of this organ with musical instruments, that their lengthening and shortening are sufficient to produce these effects.

“That these parts are capable of distention and contraction, is needless to be demonstrated in an assembly of Literati of your rank: but that in consequence of this distention and contraction, the Delphys can utter sounds more or less acute; in a word, all the inflexions of the voice, and modulation of singing; is a fact, which I flatter myself I shall put out of doubt. My appeal is to experiments. Yes, gentlemen, I engage to make both a Delphys and a Toy reason, speak, nay, and sing too, before ye.”

Thus harangued Orcotomus, promising to himself nothing less than to raise the Toys to the level of the windpipes of one of his learned brethren, whose success jealousy had attack’d in vain.

CHAP. X. Less learned and less tedious than the preceding. Continuation of the academical sitting.

BY THE DIFFICULTIES started against Orcotomus, before he could make his experiments, it appeared, that his notions were judged to have less of solidity than ingenuity. “If Toys have the faculty of speech naturally,” say they, “why have they not made use of it till now? If it was an effect of the goodness of Brama, who has been pleased to endow women with so strong a desire of talking, to double the organs of speech in them; it is very strange, that they have so long been ignorant of, or at least neglected this valuable gift of nature. Why has not the same Toy spoke more than once? Why has none of them spoke of aught but the same subject? By what mechanism does it fall out, that one of the mouths is forcibly kept shut, while the other speaks? Moreover,” added they, “if we judge of the prattle of Toys by the circumstances, in which most of them have spoken, and by the things they have told; there is all the reason in the world to believe it involuntary, and that those parts would continue mute, if it had been in the power of their possessors to impose silence on them.”

Orcotomus arose to answer these objections, and insisted that Toys talk’d in all ages; but so low, that what they said was hardly heard, even by those to whom they belonged. That it is not surprizing, that they have raised their voice in our days, when the freedom of conversation is carried so high, that one may without impudence and indiscretion converse on those things, which are the most familiar to them: that if they have spoke audibly but once, we are not to infer that that will be the only time. That there is a vast difference between being mute and keeping silence; that if they have talk’d but on one and the same subject only, probably the reason is, that it is the only one, of which they have ideas. That those who have not spoke as yet,

will speak. That if they remain silent, it is because they have nothing to say, or that they are ill made, or want ideas and terms.

“In a word,” continued he, “to pretend that it was an effect of the goodness of Brama to grant to women the means of gratifying their strong desire of talking, by multiplying in them the organs of speech; is to grant, that if this benefaction drag’d any inconveniences after it, it was an effect of his wisdom to prevent them: and this he has done, by compelling one of the mouths to keep silence, while the other speaks. It is already but too inconvenient for us, that women change their mind from one instant to another: what then would it have been, if Brama had left them the power of being of two contradictory sentiments at the same time? Further, the gift of speech has been given, purely in order to be understood; but the women, who find it a difficult talk to understand one another with a single mouth each, how could they possibly do it, if they spoke with two at a time?”

Thus Orcotomus answered several things, and thought he had given satisfactory solutions to all difficulties: but he was mistaken. New doubts were raised, and he was on the point of sinking under them; when Cimonazes came to his assistance. Then the dispute became tumultuous. They stray’d wide of the question, they bewilder’d themselves, they return’d, they bewilder’d themselves a second time, they grew angry, they brawled; from brawling they pass’d to injurious words, and the academical sitting ended.

CHAP. XI. Fourth trial of the Ring.

The Echo.



WHILE THE PRATTLE of the Toys employed the academy, in other companies it became the news of the day, and the subject of the morrow, and of several succeeding days. It was an inexhaustible text. True facts were blended with false; every thing went down, the prodigy had removed all incredulity. In conversation people lived on it upwards of six months.

The Sultan had made but three trials of his ring; and yet, in a circle of ladies who were allowed a stool at the Manimonbanda's, one of them related a discourse held by the Toy of a president's lady, next that of a marchioness, then she disclosed the pious secrets of a devotee, in fine those of several women who were not there: and God knows the stories that were father'd on their Toys; nor was there any parcimony of smutty tales. From facts they came to reflections. "I must confess," says one of those ladies, "that this witchcraft (for it is a spell cast on Toys) keeps us in a cruel state. How! to be eternally under apprehensions of hearing an impertinent voice issuing from one's self." "But madam," answered another, "this fright astonishes us with regard to you. When a Toy has nothing ridiculous to tell, what does it signify, whether it be silent or speak?" "It signifies so much," replied the first, "that I would freely give half my jewels, to be assured that mine will never speak." "Surely," replied the second, "there must be substantial reasons for keeping measures with people, to purchase their discretion at so high a price." "I have not better reasons than another," said Cephisa: "and yet I do not eat my words. Twenty thousand crowns, is not too large a sum to buy tranquillity: for I will frankly own, that I have not more confidence in my Toy than in my mouth, and many silly things have

slipt from me in my life. I hear every day so many incredible adventures unveiled, attested, detailed by Toys, that even retrenching three fourths, the remaining part is sufficient to destroy a reputation. If mine should prove but half so great a lyer as all those, I should be ruined. Was it not enough then that our conduct was in the power of our Toys, without our reputation being dependent on their discourses?" "For my part," answered Ismene smartly, without entering into endless arguments, "I allow things to go their own way. If it be Brama, that has given the faculty of speech to Toys, as my Bramin has convinced me, he will not suffer them to lye. It would be impious to assert the contrary. Wherefore my Toy may talk as often and much as it will. But after all what will it say?"

Then was heard a hollow voice, which seemed to come out of the ground, and answered by way of Echo: *Many things*. Ismene, not imagining whence the answer proceeded, flew into a passion, attack'd her neighbours, and increased the diversion of the company. The Sultan, charmed with her mistake, quitted his minister, with whom he was in conference in a corner, went to her, and said: "I am afraid, madam, you have heretofore admitted some one of these ladies into your confidence, and that their Toys are so malicious as to recollect histories, which your own might have forgot."

At the same time, by moving his ring up and down with dexterity, Mangogul caused a very singular dialogue between the lady and her Toy. Ismene, who had always conducted her little affairs well enough, and had never had a confidante, answer'd the Sultan, that all the art of calumniators would be ineffectual. "*Perhaps,*" answer'd the unknown voice. "How, perhaps," reply'd Ismene, piqued at this injurious doubt, "what have I to fear from them?" "*Every thing, if they knew as much as I.*" "And what do you know?" "*Many things, I tell you.*" "Many things, that says much, but means nothing. Can you tell any particulars?" "*Without doubt.*" "And of what nature? Have I been really in Love?" "*No.*" "Have I had intrigues,

adventures?" "*Exactly.*" "And with whom, pray? With Petits-maitres, military men, senators?" "*No.*" "Comedians?" "*No.*" "You shall see, it was with my pages, my footmen, my confessor, or my husband's chaplain." "*No.*" "Mr Impostor, you are at your wits end?" "*Not quite.*" "Yet I can see no other person, with whom one can possibly have adventures. Was it before, was it after my marriage? Answer me then, impertinent." "*Ah, madam, spare invectives, if you please. Compel not the best of your friends to take some disagreeable steps.*" "Speak, my dear, tell, tell all. I value your services as little as I fear your indiscretion. Explain your self: I not only give you full permission, but even dare you to it." "*To what do you reduce me, Ismene?*" said the Toy, breathing a deep sigh. "To render justice to vertue." "*Well then, virtuous Ismene, have you quite forgot young Osmin, the sangiac Zegris, your dancing master Alaziel, your music master Almoura?*" "Ah! what horrid calumnies," cried Ismene. "I had a mother, who was too vigilant to expose me to such irregularities: and my husband, were he here, would testify that he found me just such as he could wish." "*Very true,*" replied the Toy, "*thanks to the secret of your intimate friend Alcina.*"

"This is so extravagantly and so grossly ridiculous," said Ismene, "that it deserves no refutation. I cannot say," continued she, "which of these ladies Toys it is, that pretends to be so knowing in my affairs: but it has related things, of which my own does not know a syllable." "Madam," answered Cephisa, "I can assure you, that mine has gone no farther than giving ear." The rest said as much, and they sate down to play, without precisely knowing the interlocutor of the conversation above related.

CHAP. XII. Fifth Trial of the Ring.

Play.



MOST OF THE ladies who made the party with the Manimonbanda, play'd with great eagerness; and it was not necessary to have Mangogul's sagacity, to perceive it. The passion of gaming is one of those that puts on the least disguise. It shews itself, whether in winning or losing, by strong symptoms. "But whence proceeds this fury?" said he within himself. "How can the ladies bear to pass whole nights round a Pharaoh table, to tremble in expectation of an ace or a seven? This phrensy injures their health and beauty, when they have any: without reckoning the disorders into which I am sure it precipitates them. I have a great desire," said he to Mirzoza in the ear, "to execute here a thought just come into my head." "And what is this fine thought, which you meditate?" said the favorite. "It is," answered Mangogul, "to turn my ring on the most unbridled of these brelandiers, to interrogate her Toy, and to transmit by that organ, a good advice to all those weak husbands, who allow their wives to stake the honour and fortune of their house on a card or a dye."

"I like this notion mightily," replied Mirzoza; "but know, Prince, that the Manimonbanda has just now sworn by her Pagoda's, that she would keep no more drawing-room nights, if ever she found herself again exposed to the impudence of Engastrimuthes." "What have you said, my soul's delight?" interrupted the Sultan. "I have," answered the favorite, "made use of the name, which the modest Manimonbanda gives to all those, whose Toys have the faculty of speech." "It is of the invention of her stupid Bramin, who values himself upon knowing the Greek, and being ignorant of the Congese language," replied the Sultan. "However, with the

Manimonbanda's leave, and that of her chaplain too, I would desire to question Manilla's Toy; and it would be proper to make the interrogatories here, for the edification of the neighbours." "Prince," said Mirzoza, "if you take my word, you will spare the Manimonbanda the uneasiness this proceeding must give her: which you may do, without balking your own curiosity or mine. Why do you not go to Manilla's house?" "I will go, since you advise," said Mangogul. "But at what hour?" said the Sultana. "About midnight," answered the Sultan. "At midnight she is at play," said the favorite. "I will put off my visit then till two in the morning," replied Mangogul. "Prince, you don't consider," rejoined the favorite: "'tis the most pleasant hour of the four and twenty for female gamesters. If your highness will be led by me, you will take Manilla in her first sleep, between seven and eight."

Mangogul followed Mirzoza's advice, and visited Manilla about seven. Her women were going to put her to bed. He judged by the sadness predominant in her countenance, that she had play'd with bad luck. She walk'd to and fro, stopp'd, lifted her eyes to heaven, stamp'd with her foot, cover'd her eyes with her hands, and muttered somewhat, which the Sultan could not understand. Her women, who were undressing her, followed all these motions in panicks; and if they at length compassed getting her into bed, it was not done without receiving harsh language and something worse. Now Manilla is in bed, having made no other night prayer, but some curses against a damned ace, which came seven times successively to her loss. Scarcely had she closed her eyes, when Mangogul levell'd his ring at her. Instantly her Toy exclaimed in a sorrowful tone: "Now I am repiqued and capotted." The Sultan smiled to hear that every thing about Manilla, even to her Toy, spoke gaming. "No," continued the Toy, "I will never play against Abidul: he knows nothing but tricking. Speak to me no more of Dares: with him one runs the risq of some unlucky hits. Ismal is a pretty fair

player, but every body has him not that would. Mazulim was a treasure, before he fell into the hands of Crissa. I don't know a more whimsical player than Zulmis. Rica is less so; but the poor lad is run dry. What can one do with Lazuli? The prettiest woman of Banza could not make him play high. What a piddling player Mollius is! In truth, desolation has spread among the gamesters: and e'er long we shall not know with whom to make a party."

After this Jeremiad, the Toy fell to relating uncommon strokes, of which it had been a witness; and excessively extoll'd the constancy and resources of its mistress in bad luck. "Were it not for me," it said, "Manilla would have ruin'd herself twenty times over. All the Sultan's treasures would not have discharged the debts that I have paid. In one match at breland she lost to a farmer of the revenue and an *abbé*, above ten thousand ducats. She had nothing left but her jewels: but her husband had so lately redeem'd them, that she dared not to venture them. Nevertheless she took the cards, and had one of those seducing hands, which fortune sends, when she is on the point of cutting your throat. They urged her to speak. Manilla look'd at her cards, put her hand into her purse, whence she was sure to pull nothing, return'd to her cards, examined them again, but without determining. 'Does madam stand it at last?' said the farmer. 'Yes; I stake,' said she,— 'I stake — I stake my Toy.' 'For what value?' replied Turcares. 'For a hundred ducats,' said Manilla. The *abbé* withdrew, esteeming the Toy too high rated. Turcares declared at it: Manilla lost and paid.

"The silly vanity of possessing a titled Toy got the better of Turcares. He offered to supply my mistress with play-money, on condition that I should be subservient to his pleasures. The bargain was struck in a moment. But as Manilla play'd high, and the farmer was not inexhaustible, we soon saw the bottom of his coffers.

“My mistress had appointed a most brilliant party at Pharaoh. All her acquaintance were invited. They were to punt with nothing under ducats. We depended on the purse of Turcares. But the morning of this great day, the rascal wrote us word that he had not a penny, and left us in the utmost consternation. However, we must extricate ourselves, and there was not a moment to be lost. We pitch’d on an old chief of the Bramins, to whom we sold at a dear rate some complaisances, which he had sollicited a long time. This sitting cost him double the income of his ecclesiastical preferment.

“Turcares returned notwithstanding, in a few days. He said he was excessively concerned that madam had taken him at a nonplus: he still reckon’d on her goodness. ‘Indeed you reckon ill, my dear,’ replied Manilla: ‘I cannot with decency receive you more. When you were in a condition to lend, the world knew why I admitted you: but now that you are good for nothing, you would blast my honour.’

“Turcares was piqued at this discourse, and so was I: for he was perhaps the best lad in Banza. He waved his usual politeness, and gave Manilla to understand, that she cost him more than three opera girls, who would have amused him better, ‘Alas!’ cried he most mournfully, ‘why did I not stick to my little milliner? She loved me to folly. I made her so happy with a silk gown.’ —— Manilla, who did not relish comparisons, interrupted him in a tone, eno’ to make one tremble, and bade him begone in an instant. Turcares knew her, and chose rather to return peaceably down stairs, than to leap thro’ the window.

“After that, Manilla borrowed of another Bramin, who came, said she, to administer comfort in her afflictions. The holy man succeeded the farmer of the revenue, and we reimbursed him his comforts in the same coin. She lost me several times more, and ’tis well known that play-debts are the only ones that are paid among the *Beau Monde*.

“If Manilla happens to play with good luck, she is the most regular woman in Congo. Excepting her play, she takes surprising care of her conduct: she is never heard to swear an oath: she entertains well: she pays her mercer and other tradesmen, is liberal to her servants, redeems her nicknacks sometimes, and caresses her lap dog and her husband: but thirty times a month she risks these happy dispositions and her money on an ace of spades. Such is the life she leads, and will lead: and God knows how many times yet I shall be pawn’d.”

Here the Toy ceased, and Mangogul went to take repose. He was awaken’d at five in the afternoon, and went to the opera, according to a promise made to the favorite.

CHAP. XIII. Of the opera at Banza.

Sixth trial of the Ring.



OF ALL THE public diversions of Banza, none supported itself but the opera. Utmiutsol and Utremifasolasiutututut, two celebrated musicians, one of whom was growing old, and the other was but just new-fledged, alternately occupied the lyric scene. Each of these two original authors had his partisans. The ignorant and the grey-bearded dotards stood up for Utmiutsol; the smart young fellows and the Virtuosi were for Utremifasolasiutututut: and the people of taste, as well young as old, held them both in high esteem. Utremifasolasiutututut, said the latter, is excellent when he is good, but he sleeps at times; and, pray, to whom does not that happen? Utmiutsol holds up better, and is more uniform. He is full of beauties; yet he has not one, of which there are not examples to be found, and even more striking, in his rival; in whom there are strokes to be observed, which are entirely his own, and are not to be met with any where but in his works. Old Utmiutsol is simple, natural, smooth, sometimes too smooth, and that is his fault. Young Utremifasolasiutututut is singular, brilliant, composed, learned, sometimes too learned: but perhaps that is his hearer’s fault. The one has but one opening, beautiful indeed, but repeated at the head of all his pieces. The other has made as many openings as pieces, and they all pass for masterpieces. Nature guided Utmiutsol in the ways of melody; study and experience discovered the sources of harmony to Utremifasolasiutututut. Who ever knew how to declaim, and who will ever speak a part like the old man? Who will compose light catches, voluptuous airs, and symphonies in character like the young one? Utmiutsol is the only person who understood dialogue. Before Utremifasolasiutututut no body

distinguished the delicate touches, which separate the tender from the voluptuous, the voluptuous from the passionate, the passionate from the lascivious. Nay some partisans of the latter pretend, that if Utmiutsol's dialogue is superior to his, this is not so much owing to the inequality of their talents, as to the difference of the poets, whom they made use of. "Read, read," cried they, "the scene of Dardanus, and you will be convinced, that if we give good words to Utremifasolasiutututut, Utmiutsol's charming scenes will be revived." However that be, in my time, the whole town flock'd to the tragedies of the latter, and people stifled one another at the interludes of the former.

They were just then exhibiting in Banza an excellent piece of Utremifasolasiutututut, which would never have been represented but in nightcaps, had not the favorite Sultana had the curiosity to see it. And besides, the periodical indisposition of Toys favored the jealousy of the fiddles, and made the principal actress flinch. She, who supplied her place, had not so good a voice, but as she made amends by her manner of acting, nothing hindered the Sultan and the favorite from honouring the piece with their presence.

Mirzoza was already come, Mangogul comes, the curtain is raised, they begin. Every thing went on marvellously well: Miss Chevalier had effaced the memory of Miss le Maure, and they were at the fourth act, when the Sultan bethought himself, in the middle of a chorus, which he thought lasted too long, and had already cost the favorite two yawns, to point his ring on all the singers. Never was there seen on the stage so odd and comical a sight. Thirty women were struck dumb on a sudden. Their mouths were wide open, and they kept the same theatrical attitudes they held before. And at the same time their Toys made their throats sore with the violence of singing, this a *Pont-neuf*, that a *Vaudeville polisson*, another a very indecent parody, and all of them extravagances relative to their characters. On one

hand was heard, *oh vraiment ma comere, oui*; on the other, *quoi douze fois?* Here, *qui me baise, est-ce Blaise?* There, *rien, Pere Cyprien, ne vous retient*. In fine, they all wound themselves up into a strain, so high, so rude, and so mad, that they formed the most extravagant brawling ridiculous choir, that had been heard before and since that of —— no —— d —— on ——

Here the manuscript was worm-eaten.

All this while the Orchestra went on, and the loud laughs of the pit and boxes joined to the sound of the instruments, and the singing of the Toys, compleated the cacophony.

Some of the actresses, fearing lest their Toys, tired with quavering impertinences, might resolve to speak them out, ran behind the scenes: but they escaped with the fright only. Mangogul being perswaded that the public would learn nothing new, turn'd off his ring. In an instant all the Toys were silent, the bursts of laughter ceased, the audience grew calm, the play was resumed and finished peaceably. The curtain drop'd, the Sultana and Sultan went off, and the Toys of our actresses went to their several appointments, where they were to have a different employment from singing.

This affair made a great noise. The men laugh'd, the women were alarmed, the Bonza's were scandalized, the academicians rack'd their brains about it. But what did Orcotomus say? Orcotomus triumph'd. He had hinted in one of his memoirs, that the Toys would infallibly sing: they had sung accordingly, and this phænomenon, which disconcerted his brethren, was to him a new ray of light, and compleated the confirmation of his system.

CHAP. XIV. Orcotomus's experiments.

IT WAS ON the fifteenth of the moon of —— , that Orcotomus had read his memoir to the academy, and communicated his thoughts on the tattle of the Toys. As he then did with the greatest assurance promise to produce infallible experiments, which he had repeated several times, and always with success; the majority of people was struck with his doctrine. For some time the public preserved the favorable impressions they had received: and for full six weeks Orcotomus pass'd for having made considerable discoveries.

Nothing was wanting to complete his triumph, but performing before the academy the famous experiments, which he had preached so loudly. The assembly that met on this occasion was extremely brilliant. The ministers of state graced the meeting: the Sultan himself did not disdain to be there, but invisible.

As Mangogul was a great Monologue maker, and the futility of the conversations of his time had tainted him with the habitude of soliloquy: "Either Orcotomus," said he, "must be an arrant quack, or the Genius my protector, a great fool. If the academician, who certainly is not a conjurer, can restore speech to dead Toys; the Genius who protects me was in the wrong to make a compact, and sell his soul to the devil, for the sake of communicating it to Toys full of life."

Mangogul was puzzling himself with such reflections, when he found himself in the middle of his academy. Orcotomus had for spectators, as appears, all those in Banza, who were knowing in the subject of Toys. In order to be satisfied with his audience, all he wanted was to give them satisfaction: but the issue of his experiments proved very unhappy. Orcotomus took up a Toy, put his mouth to it, blew into it till he was out of

breath, quieted it, returned, tried another: for he had brought a variety of them with him, of all ages, sizes, conditions and colours: but in vain did he blow; nothing was heard but inarticulate sounds, vastly different from what he had promised.

Then ran a buzzing murmur thro' the company, which disconcerted him for a moment: but he recovered himself, and alledged that such experiments were not easy to be made before so great a number of people: and he was right.

Mangogul got up in wrath, went away, and in the twinkling of an eye was in the favorite Sultana's appartment. "Well, prince," said she upon seeing him, "who has won the day, you or Orcotomus? For his Toys have performed wonders to be sure." The Sultan took some turns about the room without a word of answer. "But," resumed the favorite, "your highness seems dissatisfied." "Oh! madam, the impudence of that Orcotomus is not to be match'd. Pray, do not so much as mention him from this moment — What will you say, O future generations, when you shall be informed, that the great Mangogul allowed a hundred thousand crowns in yearly pensions to such fellows; while gallant officers, who with their blood had watered the laurels that surround his brow, were reduced to twenty pound a year? —— By Jove, the thought distracts me: I shall be out of humor this month to come."

Here Mangogul broke off, and continued to walk about the room. He hung down his head, marched to and fro, stop'd, and now and then stamp'd the floor with his foot. He sat down a moment, rose up in a hurry, took his leave of Mirzoza, forgot to kiss her, and retir'd to his own appartment.

The African author, who has immortalized himself by the history of the high and marvellous exploits of Erguebzed and Mangogul, continues in these words:

By Mangogul's ill humor it was thought, that he was on the point of banishing all the learned out of his dominions. Far from it, the next day he arose in a gay mood, performed his exercises at the riding-house in the morning, in the evening supp'd with Mirzoza and some favorites, under a magnificent tent in the gardens of the Seraglio, and never appeared more disengaged from affairs of state.

The dissatisfied and the disaffected of Congo, and the newsmongers of Banza, did not fail to spread their reports of this conduct. For what do not people of this stamp find fault with? "Is this," said they in the public walks and coffee-houses, "is this governing a state? To spend the day in tilting, and the night at table." "Well, if I was Sultan," cried a little Senator ruined by gaming, parted from his wife, and whose children had the worst of education, "if I was Sultan, I would make Congo a flourishing empire. I would be the terror of my enemies, and the darling of my subjects. Within six months I would reestablish the Police, the laws, the army and the navy in their full vigour. I would have a hundred ships of the line. Our heaths should soon be grub'd up, and our high-ways repair'd. I would abolish the taxes, or at least reduce them to one half. As for pensions, gentlemen of sublime wit, by my faith, ye should but just taste them with the tip of your tongues. Good officers, Pongo Sabiam, good officers, old soldiers, magistrates like us, who devote our labours and night studies to dealing out justice to the people; these are the men on whom I would shed my bounty."

"Gentlemen," said an old toothless politician, with greasy flat hair, a coat worn out at elbows, and ragged ruffles, "have ye quite forgot our great emperor Abdelmalek, of the Dynasty of the Abyssinians, who reigned two thousand three hundred and eighty five years ago? Have ye forgot how he caused two astronomers to be impaled, for an error of three minutes in their prediction of an eclipse; and his first physician and surgeon to be dissected alive, for having ordered him a dose of manna at an improper time?"

“Moreover I ask you,” continued another, “what are those idle Bramins good for, that vermin who suck our blood, and grow fat on it. Would not their immense overflowing riches better become honest folks like us.”

From another quarter was heard: “Forty years ago, were the new cookery and the liquors of Lorraine so much as known? Our rulers are plung’d deep into luxury, which threatens approaching destruction to the empire, a necessary consequence of the contempt of the Pagoda’s and dissolution of morals. At the time when people eat but coarse meats, and drank but sherbet at Kanaglou’s table; what regard would be paid to the cut-paper ornaments, to Martin’s varnishes, and to Rameau’s music? The opera girls were not more cruel then than at present, and were to be had much cheaper. The prince, you see, spoils many good things. But if I was Sultan — —”

“If thou wert Sultan,” answered in wrath an old officer, who had escaped the dangers of the battle of Fontenoy, and had lost an arm close to his prince in the fight of Laufelt; “thou wouldst commit greater impertinences than thou now dealst out. Eh, friend, thou can’st not govern thy tongue, and thou wouldst willingly rule an empire: thou hast not sense to manage thy family, and thou pretendst to guide a state. Respect the powers of the earth, and thank the Gods for having given thee birth in the empire, and in the reign of a prince, whose prudence instructs his ministers, and whose soldiery admire his valor; who has made himself dreaded by his enemies, and beloved by his people; and whose only fault is the lenity with which persons of thy stamp are treated under his government.”

CHAP. XV. The Bramins.

AFTER THE LEARNED had spent themselves on the Toys, the Bramins took possession of them. Religion laid claim to their chit-chat, as a subject that came within its jurisdiction, and its ministers pretended that the hand of Brama manifested itself in that work.

There was held a general assembly of Pontiffs, and a resolution was taken to employ the best pens to prove in form, that the thing was supernatural, and that, till their works could be published, it should be defended by way of theses in the schools, in private conversations, in the direction of consciences, and in public harangues.

Now, altho' they unanimously agreed that the thing was supernatural; yet as the people of Congo admitted two principles, and professed a sort of Manicheism, they were divided in opinion, to which of these two principles the chit-chat of the Toys ought to be attributed.

Those who had seldom or never been out of their cells, and had turned over nothing but their books, ascribed the prodigy to Brama. "There is none but he," said they, "that can interrupt the course of nature; and time will shew, that in all this he has most profound views."

Those on the contrary, who frequented the toilets, and were oftner surprized at bed-sides than in their closets, fearing lest some indiscreet Toy or other might unveil their hypocrisy, laid their prattle to the charge of Cadabra, a mischief-making deity, and a sworn enemy to Brama and his servants. This latter system was exposed to terrible objections, and had not so direct a tendency towards the reformation of morals. Nay, its defenders did not impose on themselves about it. But the business was, to screen themselves: and in order to compass that, religion had not a single minister,

who would not have sacrificed the Pagodas and their Altars a hundred times over.

Mangogul and Mirzoza assisted regularly at the religious service of Brama, and the whole empire was informed thereof by the news-papers. On a certain day appointed for celebrating one of the principal solemnities in the great Mosq, they were present. The Bramin, whose turn it was to explain the law, mounted the rostrum, pour'd forth a volley of affected phrases and fulsome compliments on the Sultan and his favorite; and made an eloquent peroration on the manner of sitting orthodoxly in company. He had already demonstrated the necessity thereof by numberless authorities, when being instantaneously seized with a fit of sacred enthusiasm, he spoke this declamation, which had the greater effect, as it came in quite unexpected.

"What do I hear in all assemblies? a confused murmur, an unheard noise strikes my ears. All things are turn'd topsy-turvy, and the faculty of speech, which the goodness of Brama had hitherto appropriated to the tongue, is now by an effect of his vengeance transported to other organs. And what organs? You know, gentlemen. O ungrateful people, was there a necessity for a new prodigy, to rouze ye from your lethargy; and had not your crimes witnesses enough, but their principal instruments must raise their voice? Doubtless their measure is filled up; since the wrath of heaven has sought new chastisements. In vain did you envelop yourself in darkness, in vain did you choose mute accomplices: do you not hear them at present? They have given depositions against ye from every quarter, and revealed your baseness to the universe. O thou who governest by thy wisdom! O Brama! just are thy judgments. Thy law condemns theft, perjury, lying and adultery: it proscribes the blackness of calumny, the intrigues of ambition, the fury of hatred, and the artifices of insincerity. Thy faithful ministers have not ceased declaring these truths to thy children, and threatening them with the

chastisements, which thou in thy just anger reservedst for prevaricators: but in vain; the fools have delivered themselves up to the tide of their passions, they followed the torrent, they have despised our admonitions, they have laughed at our threats, they have regarded our anathema's as empty noise; their vices are accumulated, strengthen'd, multiplied; the voice of their impiety has ascended even to thy throne, and we have not been able to prevent the tremendous scourge, with which thou hast smote them. After having long implored thy mercy, let us now extoll thy justice. Overwhelmed by thy strokes, doubtless they will return to thee, and acknowledge the hand which is laid heavy on them. But O prodigy of hardheartedness! O excess of blindness! They have imputed the effect of thy power to the blind mechanism of nature. They have said in their hearts, Brama is not. All the properties of matter are not known to us, and the new proof of its existence is but a proof of the ignorance and credulity of those, who object it to us. On this foundation they have raised systems, invented hypotheses, tried experiments: but from the highth of his eternal habitation, Brama has laugh'd at their vain projects. He has confounded audacious knowledge, and the Toys have broke, as glass, the impotent obstacles opposed to their loquacity. Wherefore let those vainglorious worms confess the weakness of their reason, and the vanity of their efforts. Let them cease to deny the existence of Brama, or to prescribe limits to his power. Brama is, he is almighty, and he does not shew himself to us more visibly in his dreadful scourges, than in his ineffable favours.

"But who has drawn down these scourges on this wretched country? Is it not thy injustice, greedy incredulous man? Thy gallantries and silly amours, worldly immodest woman! Thy excesses and shameful debaucheries, infamous man of pleasure! Thy hardheartedness for our monasteries, miser! Thy injustice, corrupt magistrate! Thy usuries, insatiable money-dealer! Thy effeminacy and irreligion, impious and sycophant courtier.

“And you, on whom this scourge is particularly fallen, women and maidens plunged into licentiousness; tho’ we, renouncing the duties of our calling, should keep profound silence with regard to your irregularities, you carry about you a more importunate voice than ours: it accompanies you, and will every where rebuke you for your impure desires, your equivocal connections, your criminal conversations, such excessive care to please, so many artifices to engage, so much address to fix, and the impetuosity of your transports, and the fury of your jealousy. Why then do you delay to shake off the yoke of Cadabra, and return under the mild laws of Brama? But let us return to our subject. Well then I was saying that worldlings sit down heretically, and that for nine reasons; the first, &c.”

This discourse made very different impressions. Mangogul and the Sultana, who were the only persons that knew the secret of the ring, were convinced that the Bramin had as happily hit off the tattle of Toys by the assistance of religion, as Orcotomus by the light of reason. The court ladies and petits-maitres declared the sermon seditious, and the preacher a visionary. The rest of the audience esteem’d him a prophet, shed tears, fell to prayers, and even flagellations, and did not change their courses of life.

The noise of this sermon spread to the very coffee-houses. A wit pronounced in a decisive tone, that the Bramin had but very superficially handled the subject, and that his discourse was but a cold insipid declamation: but in the opinion of the devout women and the enlightened, it was the most solid piece of eloquence that had been delivered in the temples these hundred years. And in mine, both the wit and the devout women were in the right.

CHAP. XVI. The Muzzles.



WHILE THE BRAMINS were making Brama speak, airing their Pagoda's by processions, and exhorting the people to repentance; others were thinking how to reap benefit by the prattle of Toys.

Great cities swarm with persons, whom misery renders industrious. — They neither rob nor pick pockets: but they are to pick-pockets, what pick-pockets are to gamblers. They know every thing, they do every thing. They go up and down, they insinuate themselves. They are found at court, in the city, at Westminster hall, at church, at the play, at ladies toilets, in coffee-houses, at balls, opera's and in academies. They are any thing that you would have them be. Do you sollicit a pension, they have the minister's ear. Have you a law-suit, they will sollicite for you. Do you love gaming, they will make a party with you; good chear, they keep a good kitchen; women, they will introduce you to Amina or Acaris. From which of the two would you please to purchase the distemper? Take your choice, they will undertake your cure. Their chief occupation is to find the ridicules of private persons, and to make advantage of the follies of the public. From them it is, that papers are distributed in the streets, at the gates of temples, at the play-house doors, and other public places, by which you are advertised gratis, that such an one living at the Louvre, St. John's, the temple, or the abby, at such a sign, dupes mankind at home from nine in the morning to noon, and abroad the rest of the day.

Scarce had the Toys began to speak, when one of these sharpers fill'd the houses of Banza with a printed bill of this form and tenor. —— Advertisement to the ladies. And underneath in small Italic, by permission of my lord the great Seneschal, and with the approbation of the gentlemen of the royal academy of sciences. And lower down: The Sieur Eolipila of

the royal academy of Banza, Member of the royal society of Monoémugi, of the imperial academy of Biafara, of the academy of the curious of Loango, of the society of Camur in Monomotapa, of the institute of Ereeco, and of the royal academies of Beleguanza and Angola; who has for many years given courses of baubles, with the applause of the court, the town, and the province; has, in favour of the fair sex, invented muzzles or portable gags, which deprive Toys of the use of speech, without obstructing their natural functions. They are neat and convenient. He has some of all sizes, of all prices, and for all ages: and he has had the honour to serve persons of the highest distinction with them.

There is nothing like being a member of a body of men. Be a work ever so ridiculous, it is puff'd into success. Thus it was, that Eolipila's invention gain'd ground. People flock'd to his house. The gay ladies went thither in their own equipages, prudent women in hackney-coaches; the devouts sent their confessors or footmen, and nuns their door-keepers. Every body must have a muzzle, so that not one from the dutchess down to the cobler's Joan, but had one either for the fashion or for reasons.

The Bramins, who had declared the prattle of Toys to be a divine punishment, and flatter'd themselves with a reformation of manners and other advantages from it, could not without horror see a machine, which eluded the vengeance of heaven and their hopes. Scarcely had they come down from their pulpits, but they mount again, thunder, roar, make the oracles to speak, and pronounce that a muzzle is an infernal machine, and that there is no salvation for those who shall use them. "Carnal women, quit your muzzles; submit," cried they, "to the will of Brama. Permit the voice of your Toys to awaken that of your consciences, and blush not to acknowledge crimes, which you have not been ashamed to commit."

But their exclamations were of little avail: the same fate attended muzzles, that had formerly attended the gowns without sleeves. The

preachers were left to catch cold in the temples. All the women took gags, and quitted them not, either till they found them useless, or were tired of them.

CHAP. XVII. The two Devouts.

FOR SOME DAYS past the Sultan left the Toys at rest. Important affairs, on which he was busy, suspended the effects of his ring. In this interval it was, that two women of Banza made diversion for the whole town.

They were professed devouts. They had managed their intrigues with all possible discretion, and were in full enjoyment of a reputation, which even the malice of those of their own class paid respect to. In the mosques nothing was talk'd of but their virtue. Mothers proposed them as patterns to their daughters, and husbands to their wives. The principal maxim of both was, that scandal is the greatest of all sins. This conformity of sentiments, but above all, the difficulty of edifying a clear-sighted and crafty neighbour at an easy expence, had got the better of the difference of their tempers, and they were very good friends.

Zelida received Sophia's Bramin: and it was at Sophia's house that Zelida confer'd with her director; and by a little self-examination, the one could hardly be ignorant of what concerned the other's Toy: but the whimsical indiscretion of these Toys kept them both in cruel apprehensions. They held themselves as on the point of being unmask'd, and of losing that reputation of virtue, which had cost them fifteen years dissimulation and management, and which now embarassed them very much.

At some moments they would even forfeit their lives, especially Zelida, to be as much blasted as the greatest part of their acquaintance. "What will the world say? What will my husband do? —— What! that woman so reserved, so modest, so virtuous, that Zelida, like others, is but —— Alas! this thought distracts me! —— Yes, I wish I never had any reputation," cried Zelida in a passion.

She was then with her female friend, who was making the same reflections, but without such violent commotion. Zelida's last words made her smile. "Laugh, madam, without constraint. Burst out," said Zelida, touched to the quick. "To be sure you have good cause." "I am as sensible of the impending danger, as you can be," answered Sophia, with an air of indifference; "but how to shun it? For you will agree with me, that there is no likelyhood that your wish will be accomplish'd."

"Contrive an expedient then," replied Zelida: "Oh!" said Sophia, "I am tired of rummaging my brain, I can find none. —— To bury one's self in a country seat, is one way; but to abandon the pleasures of Banza, and renounce life, is what I will never do. I perceive that my Toy will never approve it." "What is to be done then?" "What! to leave all to providence, and laugh, as I do, at what the world will say. I have tried all shifts to reconcile reputation with pleasures: but since it is decreed that we must renounce reputation, let us at least preserve pleasures. We were uniques: but now, my dear, we shall be like a hundred thousand others; do you look on this as a hard fate?"

"Yes, without doubt," replied Zelida; "to me it seems hard to be like those, for whom I had put on a sovereign contempt. In order to avoid this mortification, methinks I would fly to the world's end."

"Set out, my dear," continued Sophia; "for my part, I stay — But *à propos*, I advise you to furnish yourself with some secret, to prevent your Toy from blabbing on the road."

"Indeed," replied Zelida, "pleasantry here has a very ill grace, and your intrepidity — —"

"You are mistaken, Zelida, there is not a grain of intrepidity in my proceeding. To let things go their own way, when we cannot stop them, is resignation. I see that I am to be dishonoured: well then, dishonour for dishonour, I shall spare myself as much of the uneasiness as I can."

“Dishonour’d!” replied Zelida, bursting into tears. “Dishonour’d! What a shock! I cannot bear it. — Oh! accursed Bonza, ’tis thou that hast ruin’d me. I loved my husband, I was born virtuous; I should have loved him still, if thou hadst not made a wicked use of thy ministry and my confidence. Dishonour’d, dear Sophia! — —”

She had not power to make an end. Sobs intercepted her words, and she fell on the carpet, quite in despair. As soon as Zelida recovered her speech, she cried out in a lamentable tone: “Alas! my dear Sophia, I shall die —— I must die. No, I shall never survive my reputation.”

“But Zelida, my dear Zelida, do not be in a hurry to die: perhaps,” said Sophia — — “No perhaps shall stop me, I must dye.” — — “But perhaps one might” — — “One might do nothing, I tell you” — — “But speak, my dear, what might one do?” — — “Perhaps one might hinder a Toy from talking.” “Ah! Sophia, you endeavour to comfort me by false hopes, you deceive me.” “No, no, I do not deceive you; only hear me, instead of distracting yourself like a mad creature. I have heard talk of Frenicol, Eolipila, gags and muzzles.” “Pray, what connexion is there between Frenicol, Eolipila, muzzles, and the danger which threatens us? What business has my Toyman here, and what is a muzzle?”

“It is this, my dear. A muzzle is a machine invented by Frenicol, approved by the academy, and improved by Eolipila, who claims the honour of the invention.” “But pray, this machine invented by Frenicol, approved by the academy, and improved by that silly fellow Eolipila.” — — “Oh! you are of a vivacity that surpasses imagination. Well then, this machine being applied to a Toy, renders it discreet in spite of its teeth.” — — “Can this be true, my dear?” “It is so said.” “We must know it,” replied Zelida, “and immediately too.”

She rang, one of her women appeared, and she sent for Frenicol. “Why not for Eolipila?” said Sophia. “Frenicol is less taken notice of,” answered

Zelida.

The Toyman came away with the messenger. “Ah! Frenicol, are you there,” said Zelida, “you are welcome. Make haste, my friend, to extricate two women out of cruel anxiety.”— “What is the business, ladies? Would you please to have some rare Toys?”— “No, we have two already, and we would willingly”— “Part with them, I suppose. Pray, ladies, let me see them, I will take them, or we will make an exchange.”— “You are mistaken, Mr. Frenicol, we have nothing to truck.”— “Well, I understand you, you have some ear-rings, which you would desire to lose, so as that your husbands may find them in my shop.” — — “Not that neither; pray, Sophia, inform him of the matter.” “Frenicol,” continued Sophia, “we want two —— What, don’t you understand?” “No, madam: how would you have me understand, when you say nothing?” — —”’Tis,” said Sophia, “because when a woman is modest, it gives her pain to speak plain on certain things.” “But yet,” replied Frenicol, “she must speak plain. I am a Toyman, not a Conjuror.” — — “You must guess however.” — — “Faith, ladies, the more I look on ye, the less I comprehend ye. When a lady is young, rich, and pretty as you are, she is not reduced to artifice: moreover, I declare sincerely, that I sell them no longer. I have left the dealing in those baubles to young beginners in the trade.”

Our devouts found the Toyman’s mistake so ridiculous, that they both burst out into a violent fit of laughter, which disconcerted him. “Permit me, ladies, to make my bow, and withdraw. You might well have spared yourselves the trouble of sending for me three miles off, to divert yourselves at my cost.” “Stop, stop, friend,” said Zelida, still laughing on. “That was not our intention. But by your misapprehending us, such ridiculous notions came into your head.” — —”’Tis in your power, ladies, to put juster into it. What is the business?” “Oh! Mr. Frenicol, let me laugh at ease, before I answer you.”

Zelida laugh’d till she panted for breath. The Toyman thought within himself that she had the vapors, or was out of her senses, and had patience. At length Zelida ceased. — — “Well,” said she, “the business relates to our Toys, our own Toys, do you understand me, Mr. Frenicol? To be sure you cannot be ignorant, that for some time past several Toys have prattled like magpyes: now we would be very glad that ours would not follow this bad example.” “Ah! now I take it, that is to say,” replied Frenicol, “that you want a muzzle each.” — — “Very right, you have hit it off truly. I have been told that Mr. Frenicol was no fool.” “Madam, your goodness is very great. As to what you require, I have of all sorts, I go this moment to bring you some.”

Frenicol went accordingly: in the mean while Zelida embraced her friend, and thank’d her for her expedient: and I, says the African author, went to take a nap, waiting his return.

CHAP. XVIII. The Toyman's return.



THE TOYMAN RETURNED, and presented the ladies with two muzzles of the best sort. — — "Ah! mercy!" cried Zelida. "What enormous muzzles are these! And who are the unhappy women, whom these will fit? This is an ell long. Indeed, friend, you must certainly have taken measure by the Sultan's mare." — — "Yes," said Sophia indolently, after having measured them with her fingers, "you are in the right; and there is but the Sultan's mare and old Rimosa, for whom these can do." — — "I protest, ladies, that they are of the common size; and that Zelmaida, Zyrphila, Amiana, and a hundred other ladies, have of the same sort." "That is impossible," said Zelida. — —"'Tis actually so however," replied Frenicol: "but they all said the same thing as ye have: and as they have, so may you undeceive yourselves by trying them on." "Mr. Frenicol may say what he will; but he shall never perswade me that this will fit me," said Zelida, "nor this me," said Sophia. "Let him shew us others, if he has any."

Frenicol, who had often experienced that women are not to be converted on that article, shew'd them muzzles for the age of thirteen. "Well," cried both at the same time, "these are such as we want." "I wish they may prove so," whisper'd Frenicol aside. "How do you sell them?" said Zelida. "But ten ducats a piece, madam." — — "Ten ducats, you forget yourself, Frenicol." — — "Madam, that is the price in conscience." — — "You make us pay for the novelty." — — "I protest, ladies, 'tis but two sixpences for a shilling." "I must own they are neatly made, but ten ducats are a great deal of money." — — "I'll abate nothing." — — "We will go to Eolipila's." — — "You may, ladies: but there are workmen and workmen, muzzles and muzzles." Frenicol held firm, and Zelida came to. She paid for the two muzzles, and the Toyman went back, fully perswaded that they would be

too little for them, and would soon be returned on his hands for a fourth part of the price he received for them. He was mistaken. Mangogul not happening to come within reach of turning his ring on those two women, their Toys were not seized with the humor of talking louder than ordinary; and happily for them: for Zelida having tried her muzzle, found it too little by one half. However, she did not part with it, fancying that it would be pretty near as inconvenient to change it, as not to make use of it at all.

These circumstances came to light from one of her women, who told them in confidence to her lover, who related them in confidence to others, who spread them all over Banza under the seal of secresy. Nor was Frenicol silent: the adventure of the devouts became public, and for sometime afforded employment to the calumniators of Congo.

Zelida became inconsolable upon it. This woman, more to be pitied than blamed, conceived an aversion for her Bramin, quitted her husband, and shut herself up in a convent. As for Sophia, she threw off the mask, despised censures, patch’d and painted, frequented public places, and had adventures.

CHAP. XIX. Seventh trial of the Ring.

The stifled Toy.



THO' THE FEMALE cits of Banza doubted whether Toys of their rank would be honoured with the gift of speech; yet they all furnish'd themselves with muzzles. In Banza muzzles became as common, as a general court mourning in this country.

Here the African author observes with astonishment, that neither the lowness of the price, nor the commonness of muzzles put them out of fashion in the Seraglio. "This once," says he, "utility got the better of prejudice." So trite a reflection was not worth the pains of repeating: but to me it seems as if it was the defect of all the ancient authors of Congo, to fall into repetitions; whether they thereby hoped to give a greater air of truth and facility to their productions; or that they were far from having as much fecundity of invention as their admirers ascribe to them.

However that be, one day Mangogul, walking in his gardens, attended by his whole court, took the maggot to level his ring at Zelais. She was handsome, and suspected of several adventures: yet her Toy did no more than stammer, and utter'd only some few mangled words, which had no meaning, and which the Blasters interpreted as they thought fit. — — "Pshuh!" says the Sultan, "here is a Toy that has a vast impediment of speech. Most certainly there must be somewhat that impedes its respiration." Wherefore he applied his ring more intensely. The Toy made a second effort to speak; and in some measure surmounting the obstacle, that stop'd its mouth, these words were heard very distinctly. "Alas! alas! — I am — I am — I am stifled. I can no more. — Alas! alas! I am stifled."

Immediately Zelais found herself going: she grew pale, her neck swell'd, and she fell, with her eyes shut and mouth half open, between the arms of those who stood around her.

Any where else Zelais would have been speedily relieved. 'Twas only debarrassing her of her muzzle, and allowing her Toy a freedom of respiration: but how to lend the helping hand in Mangogul's presence. "Quick, quick, physicians," cried the Sultan, "Zelais is dying."

Some pages ran to the palace, and returned, with the doctors gravely marching after them. Orcotomus was at their head. Some gave their opinion for bleeding, others for the *kermes mineral*; but the penetrating Orcotomus ordered Zelais to be carried to a neighbouring closet, examined her, and cut the braces of her harness. This muzzled Toy was one of those, which he boasted to have seen in the paroxysm.

However, the bloating was excessive, and Zelais would have continued to suffer, had not the Sultan had pity on her condition. He turn'd off his ring, the fluids return'd to their equilibrium. Zelais came to herself, and Orcotomus assumed the honour of this miraculous cure.

Zelais's accident and her physician's indiscretion, made the muzzles lose much of their credit. Orcotomus, without any regard to Eolipila's interest, proposed to himself to raise his own fortune on the ruins of the others; advertised himself as a patentee physician of Toys that had caught cold: and some of his bills are to be seen at this day in the by-streets. He began by getting money, and ended by falling into contempt. The Sultan took pleasure in lowering the presumption of the empiric. Did Orcotomus boast of silencing a Toy that had never utter'd a word? Mangogul had the cruelty to make it speak. People went so far as to remark, that any Toy that was tired of silence, need only have two or three visits from Orcotomus. In a little time he was rank'd with Eolipila in the class of quacks; and they will both continue therein, until it shall please Brama to take them out.

Shame was preferred to the apoplexy. “The one kills,” said the women, “the other does not.” Wherefore they renounced their muzzles; let their Toys talk on; and no body died thereby.

CHAP. XX. Eighth trial of the Ring.

The Vapors.



THERE WAS A time, as we have seen, when the women dreaded the prating of their Toys, were stifled, and died away; but another succeeded, when they set themselves above this dread, threw away their muzzles, and had nothing beyond the vapors.

The favorite, among her attendants, had a very singular young lady. Her humour was charming, tho' uneven. She changed countenance ten times a day; but whatever face she put on, was pleasing. Unique in her melancholy, as well as in her gaiety, there slip'd from her, in her most extravagant moments, things of exquisite sense; and in her fits of sadness she uttered very diverting extravagances.

Mirzoza was so used to Callirhoe (for that is the name of this young mad girl) that she could hardly be without her. One time that the Sultan complain'd to the favorite of somewhat restless and cold, which he remark'd in her; "Prince," said she, embarrassed at his reproach, "without my three beasts, my nightingale, my lap-dog and Callirhoe, I am good for nothing; and you see that I have not the last." "And why is she not here?" said Mangogul. "I can't tell," answered Mirzoza; "but I remember, that some months ago she told me, that if Mazul made the campaign, she could not avoid having the vapors; and Mazul set out yesterday." "I easily excuse her," said the Sultan: "for I look on her vapors to be well grounded. But upon what account do a hundred other women take it into their heads to be vapor'd, who have young husbands, and besides take care to be well provided with lovers?" "Prince," answered a courtier, "'tis a fashionable disease. It is genteel in a woman to have the vapors. Without a lover and the

vapors, she knows nothing of the world: and there is not a citizen's wife in Banza, who does not affect to have them."

Mangogul smiled, and resolved to visit some of these vaporish women immediately. He went directly to Salica's house, and found her in bed, with her neck quite bare, her eyes flaming, and her hair dishevel'd; and at her bed's side the little stammering hump-back'd physician Farfadi, telling her stories: while she was stretching out, now one arm, then another, yawning, sighing, putting her hand to her head, and exclaiming bitterly: "Alas I can't bear it — throw the windows open — give me air — I shall faint, I shall dye. — —"

Mangogul took advantage of the moment that her affrighted women were assisting Farfadi in lightening the bed-cloaths, to turn his ring on her, and instantly these words were heard: "Oh! how tired I am of this humor! behold, madam has taken into her noddle to have the vapors. This farce will last eight days at least, and may I dye, if I know the cause: for after Farfadi's efforts to ferret out this disease, I think it is in the wrong to continue."— "Good," said the Sultan turning off his ring, "I understand. This dame has the vapors in favor of her physician. Let us try elsewhere."

He went from Salica's house to that of Arsinoe, which is not far from it. On entering her chambers he heard loud bursts of laughter, and advanced, thinking to find her in company: but she was alone; and Mangogul was not much surprized. "A woman who gives herself the vapors," says he, "gives them melancholy or merry, as is most convenient." He turn'd his ring on her, and presently her Toy began to laugh unmercifully. From these immoderate laughing fits it made a sudden transition to ridiculous lamentations on the absence of Narces, whom it advised as a friend to hasten his return; and continued to sob, weep, groan, sigh, and be comfortless, as if it had buried all its relations.

The Sultan, who could hardly refrain from laughing aloud at so whimsical an affliction, turn’d off his ring and departed; leaving Arsinoe and her Toy to lament at leisure, and inferring the falsity of the proverb.

CHAP. XXI. Ninth Trial of the Ring.

Of Things lost and found.



To serve as a Supplement to the learned Treatise of Pancirollus, and to the Memoirs of the Academy of Inscriptions.

Mangogul returning to his palace, pondering on the ridiculous airs which women give themselves, found himself, whether thro' absence of mind, or some blunder of his ring, under the portico of the sumptuous building, which Thelis has decorated with the rich spoils of her lovers. He embraced the opportunity, to interrogate her Toy.

Thelis was the wife of the Emir Sambuco, whose ancestors had reign'd in Guinea. Sambuco had acquired a high reputation in Congo, by five or six signal victories, which he had gain'd over Erguebzed's enemies. As he was not a less able negotiator than a great captain, he had been employ'd in embassies of the greatest consequence, and executed his high trust with superior talents. On his return from Loango he saw Thelis, and was smitten. He was then upon the brink of fifty, and Thelis was not above twenty-five. She was rather agreeable than a beauty: the women said she was well enough, and the men thought her charming. Powerful matches sought her; but whether she had already fix'd her notions, or that there was too great a disproportion of fortune between her and her admirers, they were all rejected. Sambuco saw her, laid at her feet immense riches, a great name, laurels, and titles inferior to none but those of sovereigns, and obtain'd her.

Thelis was, or appear'd virtuous for six whole weeks after her marriage. But a Toy born voluptuous, seldom conquers itself; and a quinquagenarian husband, tho' otherwise ever so great a hero, is a madman, if he flatters

himself with conquering such an enemy. Altho' Thelis mix'd prudence with her conduct, her first adventures were not unknown. This was sufficient for supposing afterwards, that she had others undisclosed: and Mangogul, desirous of full information, hastened to pass from the porch of her palace into her appartment.

It was then the middle of summer. The heat was excessive, and Thelis, after dining, had thrown herself on a couch, in a back closet adorned with glasses and paintings. She was a-sleep, her hand leaning on a collection of Persian tales, which had lull'd her to repose.

Mangogul view'd her some time, allowed that she had charms, and turn'd his ring on her. "I remember it as perfectly as if it had been yesterday: nine proofs of love in four hours. Ah! what moments! Zermounzaid is a divine man! He is not the old frozen Sambuco. — Dear Zermounzaid, I had been ignorant of true pleasures, real good: you alone made me sensible of them."

Mangogul, desirous of learning the particulars of Thelis's commerce with Zermounzaid, which the Toy kept from him, by dwelling on what affects a Toy the most feelingly, rubb'd the stone of his ring for some time against his waistcoat, and levell'd it, quite sparkling with light, at Thelis. Its influence soon reach'd her Toy, which being thereby better informed of what was required of it, re-assumed its discourse in a more historical strain.

"Sambuco commanded the Monoémugian army, and I followed him to the field. Zermounzaid served under him in quality of a colonel, and the general, who honoured him with his confidence, had put us under his escort. The zealous Zermounzaid did not abandon his post: he thought it too pleasing, to resign it: and the danger of losing it was the only one he fear'd during the whole campaign.

"While we were in winter quarters, I entertained a few new guests; Cacil, Jekia, Almamoun, Jasub, Selim, Manzora, Nereskim, all military men, who

were commended by Zermounzaid, but were inferior to him. The credulous Sambuco relied for his wife's virtue on herself, and on Zermounzaid's care: and being entirely taken up with the immense business of the war, and the great operations which he was meditating for the glory of Congo, he never had the least suspicion either of the treachery of Zermounzaid, or the infidelity of Thelis.

"The war continued; the armies took the field, and we our litters. As they went a very slow pace, the main body of the army gain'd ground of us, and we found ourselves in the rear, which Zermounzaid commanded. This gallant youth, whom the sight of the greatest dangers had never made to swerve a foot from the path of glory, could not resist that of pleasure. He entrusted a subaltern with the care of watching the motions of the enemy, who harrassed us; and got up into our litter: but he was hardly there, when we heard a confused noise of arms and outcries. Zermounzaid, leaving his business half done, attempts to jump out: but he is level'd with the ground, and we become a prey to the conqueror.

"Thus I began by swallowing up the honor and services of an officer, who from his valour and merit might have expected the highest military employments, if he had never known his general's wife. Upwards of three thousand men fell in this action; and therefore of so many good subjects have we robb'd the nation."

Let any one, if he can, imagine Mangogul's surprize at this discourse. He had heard Zermounzaid's funeral oration, and did not know him by these features. His father Erguebzed had regretted this officer: the news-papers, after lavishing the highest eulogies on his fine retreat, had attributed his defeat and death to the enemy's superior numbers, which, as they said, were found to be six to one. All Congo had lamented a man, who had done his duty so well. His wife obtain'd a pension: his regiment was given to his eldest son, and an ecclesiastical preferment promised to his younger.

“What horror!” cried Mangogul, but softly. “A husband dishonor’d, the state betray’d, subjects sacrificed, crimes not only concealed, but even rewarded as virtues: and all that for a Toy.”

Thelis’s Toy, which had stopt to take breath, continued: “Thus am I abandoned to the enemy’s discretion. A regiment of dragoons was ready to fall upon us. Thelis seem’d quite frighted, and yet wish’d nothing more ardently: but the charms of the prey sowed discord among the plunderers. The scimiters were drawn, and thirty or forty men were massacred in the twinkling of an eye. The noise of this disorder reach’d the general officer. He ran thither, calmed the furious soldiers, and sequestrated us under a tent; where we had not time to know ourselves, when he came and demanded the price of his good services. ‘Woe to the vanquished,’ cried Thelis, falling backward on a bed: and the whole night was spent in feeling her misfortune.

“The next day we found ourselves on the banks of the Niger. A saick was waiting for us, and my mistress and I set out, in order to be presented to the emperor of Benin. In this twenty-four hours voyage the captain of the vessel offer’d himself to Thelis, and was accepted: and I found by experience, that the sea service is infinitely brisker than the land service.

“We saw the emperor of Benin. He was young, ardent, voluptuous. Thelis made a conquest of him: but those of her husband affrighted the monarch. He demanded peace: and the price, at which he purchased it, was but three provinces and my ransom.

“Different times, different fatigues. Sambuco came to know, I can’t tell how, the reason of the misfortunes of the preceding campaign; and during this, he deposited me with a friend of his, a chief of the Bramins, on the frontiers. The holy man made but a weak defence: he was ensnared by the wiles of Thelis, and in less than six months devoured his immense income, three lakes and two forests.”

“Mercy,” cried Mangogul, “three lakes and two forests! What an appetite for a Toy!”

“’Tis a mere trifle,” resumed the Toy. “Peace was made, and Thelis accompanied her husband in his embassy to Monomotapa. She gamed, and very fairly lost a hundred thousand sequins in one day, which I won back again in an hour. A minister, whose master’s affairs did not fill up all his time, fell into my clutches; and in three or four months I eat him up a fine landed estate, together with his castle well furnish’d, a park, and equipage, with the little pyed horses. A favor of four minutes duration, but well spun out, brought us in feasts, presents and jewels: and the blind or politic Sambuco did not disturb us.

“I shall not bring into the accompt,” added the Toy, “the marquisats, counties, titles, coats of arms, &c. which have been eclipsed at my appearance. Apply to my secretary, who will tell you what is become of them. I have close-pared the horns of the dominions of Biafara, and am in possession of an entire province of Beleguanza. Erguebzed made overtures to me a little before his death.” At these words Mangogul turn’d off his ring, and silenced this gulph: he respected his father’s memory, and would hear nothing that might tarnish the splendor of the great qualities, which he knew were in him.

Returning to the seraglio, he entertained the favorite with the vapored ladies, and with the trial of his ring on Thelis. “You admit this woman,” said he, “to your familiarity: but in all probability you do not know her as well as I.” “I understand you, sir,” answered the Sultana. “Her Toy has perhaps been foolish enough to give you a narrative of her adventures with the general Micokof, the Emir Feridour, the senator Marsupha, and the great Bramin Ramanadanutio. But pray, who is ignorant, that she keeps young Alamir, and that old Sambuco, who speaks not a word, is as well apprized of it as you.”

“You have not hit the mark,” replied Mangogul. “I have compell’d her Toy to make a full discharge.” “Had it swallowed any thing of yours,” said Mirzoza. “No,” said the Sultan, “but much belonging to my subjects, to the grandees of my empire, to the neighbouring potentates; as estates, provinces, castles, lakes, forests, diamonds, equipages, with the little pyed horses.” “Without reckoning their reputation and virtue, sir,” added Mirzoza. “I cannot tell what benefit you will reap by your ring; but the more you try it, the more odious my sex becomes to me: even those, whom I thought I justly held in some esteem, are not expected. They have thrown me me into such an humor, that I beg your highness will allow me to indulge it alone for some moments.” Mangogul, who knew that the favorite was an enemy to all constraint, kiss’d her right ear thrice, and retired.

CHAP. XXII. A Sketch of Mangogul's moral Philosophy.



MANGOGUL, IMPATIENT TO see the favorite again, slept little, arose earlier than usual, and was in her appartment before sun-rising. She had already rung the bell: a servant had just opened the curtains, and her women were preparing to dress her. The Sultan look'd narrowly around her, and seeing never a dog, he asked her the reason of this oddity. "I see," answered Mirzoza, "that you think me singular in this article, but there is nothing in it." "I assure you," replied the Sultan, "that I see dogs about all the women of my court, and you will oblige me in informing me why they have them, or why you have none. Most of them have several, and not one of them but lavishes such caresses on her own, as she seems not to bestow on her lover without some difficulty. How come these beasts to deserve the preference? What use is made of them?"

Mirzoza was puzzled at these questions: however, she made this answer. "To be sure, one keeps a dog as a parrot or a canary bird. It may be ridiculous to set one's heart on these animals; but there is nothing wonderful in having them: they sometimes amuse, and never injure. If they are caressed, 'tis because such caresses are of no consequence. Besides, do you believe, prince, that a lover is satisfied with a kiss, such as a woman bestows on her pug-dog?" "Doubtless, I believe it," says the Sultan. "By Jupiter the man must be very nice, who would not be satisfied."

One of Mirzoza's women, who had gain'd the good will of the Sultan and his favorite by sweetness of temper, good parts, and zeal, said: "These animals are inconvenient and nasty: they dirty one's clothes, spoil the furniture, tare laces, and do more mischief in a quarter of an hour, than would be sufficient to throw the most faithful lady's woman into disgrace: and yet they are kept."

“Tho’, according to madam, they are good for nothing but that,” added the Sultan.

“Prince,” said Mirzoza, “we stick to our fancies, and the keeping of dogs must be one, like many others, which would be no longer fancies, if we could give a reason for them. The reign of monkeys is past, the parrots still support themselves. Dogs fell, and now they rise again. Squirrels have had their time: and it is with animals, as it has successively been with Italian, English, geometry, farthingales, and furbela’s.”

“Mirzoza,” replied the Sultan, shaking his head, “has not all the knowledge that may be acquired on this subject; and the Toys — —”

“Is not your highness going to imagine,” said the favorite, “that you will be inform’d by Haria’s Toy, why that woman, who saw her son, one of her daughters, and her husband, die without shedding a tear, wept the loss of her lap-dog for a whole fortnight.”

“Why not?” replied Mangogul.

“Truly,” says Mirzoza, “if our Toys could explain all our whims, they would be more knowing than ourselves.”

“Pray, who disputes that with you?” replied the Sultan. “For my part I believe that the Toy makes a woman do a hundred things, without her perceiving it: and I have remark’d on more occasions than one, that a woman, who thought she was following her head, was obeying her Toy. A great philosopher placed the soul, I mean ours, in the pineal gland. If I allowed women to have one, I well know where I would place it.”

“I excuse you from informing me,” rejoin’d Mirzoza hastily. “But you will permit me at least,” said Mangogul, “to communicate some notions to you, which my ring has suggested to me concerning women, upon a supposition that they have a soul. The experiments, which I have made with my ring, have made me a great moralist. I have neither the wit of La Bruyere, nor the logic of Port Royal, nor the imagination of Montaigne, nor

the wisdom of Charron: but I have collected facts, to which perhaps they were strangers."

"Speak, prince," answered Mirzoza ironically, "I will hear you with all my ears. Moral essays of a Sultan of your age must be something curious."

"The system of Orcotomus is extravagant, with the leave of his fellow academician Hiragu: yet I find some sense in the answers which he gave to the objections started against it. If I allowed a soul to women, I would willingly suppose with him, that Toys have spoken from the beginning, but softly: and that the effect of the Genius Cucufa's ring is reduced to raising their voice. Upon this foundation nothing can be more easy than to define the whole sex.

"The sober woman, for example, would be she whose Toy is silent, or is not attended to.

"The prude, she who pretends not to listen to her Toy.

"The intriguing woman, she whose Toy desires a great deal, and who allows it too much.

"The voluptuous, she who gives ear to her Toy with complaisance.

"The courtezan, she on whom her Toy is making demands every moment, and who refuses it nothing.

"The coquette, she whose Toy is mute, or is not attended to; but who gives hopes to all the men that come near her, that her Toy will speak one day or other, and it may happen that she will not lend it a deaf ear.

"Well, delight of my soul, what do you think of my definitions?" "I think," said the favorite, "that your highness has forgot the tender woman."

"If I have not mentioned her," answered the Sultan, "'tis because I don't know what the term means; and that some able men pretend, that the word tender, abstracting from all connection with the Toy, is void of sense."

"How, void of sense," cried Mirzoza. "What! there is no medium then; and a woman must absolutely be a prude, an intriguer, a coquette, a

voluptuous woman, or a libertin."

"Delight of my soul," said the Sultan, "I am willing to own the inaccuracy of my enumeration, and will add the tender woman to the preceding characters; but on condition that you will furnish me with a definition of her, which will not coincide with any of mine."

"Most willingly," said Mirzoza. "I hope to compass it without quitting your system."

"Let us see," added Mangogul.

"Well then," replied the favorite— "a tender woman is she — —"

"Courage, Mirzoza," said Mangogul.

"Oh! I beg you won't disturb me. The tender woman is she —— who has loved without a word utter'd by her Toy, or —— whose Toy has never spoke, but in favor of the single man whom she loved."

It would not have been polite in the Sultan to chicane the favorite, and ask her what she understood by love: wherefore he avoided it. Mirzoza took his silence for consent, and proceeded, proud of having extricated herself from a difficulty, which to her appeared considerable. "Ye men believe, because we do not argue in form, that we do not reason. Know once for all, that we could as easily discover the falsity of your paradoxes, as ye that of our reasonings, if we would give ourselves the trouble. If your highness was less in a hurry to satisfy your curiosity on the subject of lap-dogs, I would in my turn give you a scrap of my philosophy. But it shall not be lost: I will reserve it for one of those days, that you will have more time to bestow on me."

Mangogul assured her that he had no better business, than to profit of her philosophical notions; that the metaphysics of a Sultana of twenty two, ought not to be less singular than the morals of a Sultan of his age.

But Mirzoza apprehending that this was pure complaisance in Mangogul, begg'd some time to prepare, and thus gave the Sultan a pretext for flying

whither his impatience might call him.



Sultan Mangogul in Haria’s chamber.

CHAP. XXIII. Tenth trial of the Ring.

The Dogs.



MANGOGUL WENT IMMEDIATELY to Haria's house; and as he took pleasure in soliloquy, he said within himself: "This woman never goes to bed without her four dogs, and either Toys know nothing of those animals, or her's will give me some account of them; for, thank God, 'tis well known that she loves her dogs to admiration." At the end of this monology he found himself in Haria's anti-chamber, and his olfactory organ already informed him of madam having her usual company in bed with her. These were a little shag-dog, a spaniel, and two pug-dogs. The Sultan drew out his snuff-box, took two pinches of Spanish by way of preservative, and approached Haria. She was asleep, but the pack, who were upon the watch, hearing some noise, fell to barking, and woke her. "Peace, my children," said she, but in so mild a tone, that she could not be suspected of speaking to her daughters, "go to sleep, go to sleep, and don't disturb my rest nor your own."

Haria was formerly young and pretty. She had had lovers of her own rank, but they all disappear'd even sooner than her charms. By way of comforting herself for this desertion, she gave into a whimsical sort of pomp, and her footmen were the handsomest fellows in Banza. She grew older and older, and years threw her into oeconomy: she restrained herself to four dogs and two Bramins, and became a model of edification. And surely the most envenom'd satyr could find no room to carp at this management; and for above ten years Haria was in peaceful possession of a high reputation of virtue, and of those animals. Nay, her tenderness for the

pug-dogs was so well known, that the Bramins were no longer suspected of sharing it.

Haria renewed her intreaty to those beasts, and they had the complaisance to obey. Then Mangogul applied his ring, and the superannuated Toy set about relating the last of its adventures. It was such a vast while since the first were atchieved, that it had almost lost the very remembrance of them. “Withdraw, Pompey,” it said with a hoarse voice, “you fatigue me. I like Dido better; I find her more gentle.” Pompey, who was absolutely ignorant of the Toy’s voice, went on in his own way: but Haria awaking, continued. “Get away, then, you little rogue, you hinder me from taking rest. That is well some times: but too much is too much.” Pompey withdrew. Dido took his place, and Haria fell asleep.

Mangogul, who had suspended the energy of his ring, turn’d it on, and the antiquated Toy, uttering a deep, sigh, fell to jabbering, and said: “Alas! how I am grieved for the death of my large grey-hound; she was the best little wife, the most caressing creature: she never ceased giving amusement. She was so sensible, so genteel. Ye are but beasts in comparison of her. That naughty master of mine killed her. —— Poor Zinzolina, I never think of her, without watering my plants. I thought it would have been the death of my mistress. She neither eat nor drank for two days, and narrowly escaped losing her senses. Judge of her sorrow: her director, her friends, nay her very pug-dogs were kept from me. Orders were issued to her women to refuse the door of her appartment to my master, under the penalty of being turn’d off. — — ‘That monster has robb’d me of my dear Zinzolina,’ cried she; ‘let him not appear before me, I am resolved never to see him more.’”

Mangogul, curious of learning the circumstances of Zinzolina’s death, revived the electrical power of his ring by rubbing it on the skirt of his doublet, pointed it at Haria, and the Toy resumed: “Haria, Ramadec’s widow, coiffed herself with Sindor. This youth was of good birth, had no

other fortune, but a certain merit which pleases the sex, and was, after dogs, Haria's predominant taste. Sindor's indigence conquered his repugnance to Haria's years and dogs. Twenty thousand crowns a year blinded his eyes with regard to the wrinkles of his mistress, and the inconveniency of the pug-dogs; and he married her.

"He was in hopes of getting the better of our beasts by his talents, and complaisant behavior; and to bring them into disgrace from the very commencement of his reign; but he was deceived. After the expiration of some months, when he thought he had merited much by his services; he took into his head to remonstrate to madam, that her dogs were not as good company in bed for him as for her; that it was ridiculous to have more than three; and that to admit more than one at a time, was turning the nuptial bed into a kennel.

"'I advise you,' said Haria, in a furious tone, 'to attack me with such speeches. Truly it well becomes a pitiful younger son from Gascony, whom I have taken from a garret, which was not good enough for my dogs, to give himself airs of nicety! To be sure, your sheets were perfumed, my little squire, when you dwelt in furnish'd lodgings. Know this once for all, that my dogs were long before you in possession of my bed, and that you may choose either to quit it, or be content to share it with them.'

"The declaration was peremptory, and our dogs remain'd masters of their post. But one night, as we were all asleep, Sindor, in turning unluckily kick'd Zinzolina. The hound, not used to such treatment, bit the calf of his leg; and madam was immediately awaked by Sindor's cries. 'What is the matter with you, Sir, one would think your throat was cutting: you dream.' 'It is your dogs, madam, that devour me, and your grey-hound has just torn off a piece of my leg.' 'Is that all?' says Haria, turning from him. 'You make a vast noise for nothing.'

“Sindor, piqued at this discourse, jump’d out of bed, swearing that he would never set his foot in it again, till the pack was banish’d thence. He employ’d friends, in order to obtain the exile of the dogs: but they all failed in that important negotiation. Haria’s answer to them was, that Sindor was a knight of the post, whom she had drawn out of a cock-loft, which he shared with rats and mice; that it ill became him to be so nice; that he slept the whole night long; that she loved her dogs; that they amused her; that from her infancy she had taken a liking to their caresses; and that she was resolved never to deprive herself of them till death. ‘Tell him besides,’ continued she, addressing the mediators, ‘that if he does not humbly submit to my will, he will repent it while he lives; that I will retract the donation I have made him, and will add it to the sums which I have bequeathed by my will, for the support of my dear children.’

“Between you and me,” added the Toy, “Sindor must have been a great fool, to hope that she would do for him, what could not be obtained by twenty lovers, a director, a confessor, with a legion of Bramins, who had all lost their Latin on that head. Mean while, as often as Sindor met our animals, he was seized with such fits of passion, as he could hardly conquer. One day the unfortunate Zinzolina fell in his way. He took her by the neck, and threw her out of the window. The poor creature was kill’d by the fall. Then it was, that a fine noise was made. Haria, with inflamed countenance, and eyes bathed in tears — —”

The Toy was going to repeat what it had already told; for Toys willingly fall into repetitions: but Mangogul cut its words short. Its silence was not of long duration: when the prince thought he had put this doting Toy out of its road, he restored it the freedom of speech; and the Tatler, bursting out into a loud laugh, resumed by way of recollection: “But *à propos*, I forgot to tell you what pass’d on Haria’s wedding-night. I have seen a power of ridiculous things in my life, but never one that came up to this. After a

splendid supper, the bride and bridegroom were conduced to their appartment. Every body retired except madam's women who undress her: she is undress'd, put to bed, and Sindor alone remains with her. Observing that the shag-dog, the two pugs, and the grey-hound, more alert than himself, were taking possession of his bride; 'permit me, madam,' he said, 'to remove these rivals a little.' 'My dear, do what you can,' answered Haria: 'for my part, I have not the courage to drive them away; these little animals are so attached to me; and I have been so long without any other company.' 'Perhaps,' replied Sindor, 'they will have the politeness this night to surrender the fort to me, which I must take possession of.' 'Try, sir,' said Haria.

"At first Sindor tried gentle means, and pray'd Zinzolina to retire to a corner. But the untractable animal fell to growling: the allarm spread among the rest of the troop; and the pug-dogs and shag-dog bark'd as if their mistress's throat was cutting. Sindor, losing all patience at this noise, tosses away one of the pugs, drives off the other, and seizes Pompey by the paw. Pompey, the faithful Pompey, abandoned by his allies, endeavour'd to repair this loss by the advantages of the post. Fix'd on his mistress's thighs, with eyes inflamed, hair standing an end, and open mouth, he grin'd, and shew'd the enemy two rows of very sharp teeth. Sindor made several assaults on him, and Pompey repell'd him as often, with bitten fingers and torn ruffles. The action lasted above a quarter of an hour with an obstinacy which gave diversion to none but Haria; when Sindor had recourse to a stratagem against an enemy, whom he despaired conquering by force. He provoked Pompey with the right hand. Pompey watching this motion, did not observe that of the left, and was seized by the neck. He made most vigorous efforts to disengage himself, but in vain. He was obliged to quit the field of battle, and surrender up Haria. Sindor took possession of her, but not without effusion of blood: in all likelihood Haria had resolved that

her wedding-night should be a bloody one: her animals made a good defence, and disappointed not her expectations."

"There," says Mangogul, "is a Toy, that could write a Gazette better than my secretary." And now well knowing what notions to form of lap dogs, he return'd to the favorite.

"Prepare yourself," said he, as soon as he saw her, "to hear the most extravagant things in the world. 'Tis much worse than the baboons of Palabria. Could you believe, that Haria's four dogs were the rivals, and the preferred rivals of her husband; and that the death of a greyhound has raised a quarrel between that couple, never to be made up."

"What do you say," replied the favorite, "of rivals and dogs. I am quite in the dark. I know that Haria loves her dogs excessively; but I know at the same time that Sindor is a hot-temper'd man, who perhaps did not use all that complaisance, which women require, to whom a man owes his fortune. But yet, whatever has been his conduct, I cannot conceive that it has drawn rivals on him. Haria is so venerable, that I could wish your highness would vouchsafe to explain yourself more intelligibly."

"Listen," says Mangogul, "and agree that women have excessively whimsical tastes, to say nothing worse;" then he related Haria's history to her word for word, as the Toy had told it. Mirzoza could not refrain from laughter at the first night's battle: but presently resuming a serious air: "I can't tell," said she to Mangogul, "what indignation seizes me. I shall have an aversion for these animals and all those who keep any, and I shall declare to my women that I will turn off the first, who shall be even suspected of having a lap-dog."

"Pray," replied the Sultan, "why will you extend your hatred so far? You women are always upon extremes. These animals are good for hunting, are necessary in the country, and have many other uses, without reckoning that which Haria makes of them."

“In truth,” said Mirzoza, “I begin to believe that your highness will find it a difficult task to light on a virtuous woman.”

“I told you so,” answered Mangogul; “but let us not be over hasty: you may one time or other upbraid me with being indebted to your want of patience for a declaration, which I pretend to owe entirely to the trials of my ring. I have some in my mind, which will astonish you. All secrets are not yet unveiled; and I expect to draw more important discoveries from those Toys, which remain to be consulted.”

Mirzoza was in perpetual apprehensions for her own. Mangogul’s discourse threw her into such uneasiness, as she was not able to conceal from him: but the Sultan, who had bound himself by an oath, and in his heart had a regard for religion, used his best endeavours to calm her mind, gave her some very tender kisses, and went to his council, whither affairs of moment called him.

CHAP. XXIV. Eleventh trial of the Ring.

The Pensions.



CONGO HAD BEEN disturbed by bloody wars in the reigns of Kanaglou and Erguebzed; and those two monarchs had immortalized themselves by the conquests they had made over their neighbours. The emperors of Abex and Angola look'd on the youth of Mangogul and the beginning of his reign, as favourable conjunctures to recover the provinces that had been taken from them. Wherefore they declared war against Congo, and attacked it on every side. Mangogul had the best council in all Africa: and old Sambuco and the Emir Mirzala, who were train'd up in the former wars, were placed at the head of the troops, gain'd victories on victories, and formed generals capable of succeeding them; an advantage of greater importance than even their successes.

Thanks to the activity of the council, and the good conduct of the generals, the enemy, who thought themselves sure of overcoming the empire, did not advance as far as the frontiers, made a poor defence of their own, and saw their fortified towns and provinces ravaged. But, such constant and glorious successes notwithstanding, Congo grew weaker by aggrandizing itself: the frequent raising of troops unpeopled the towns and country: and the treasury was exhausted.

The sieges and battles had cost a vast number of lives: the grand Visir, very lavish of the blood of the soldiery, was accused of having hazarded battles that tended to nothing. Every family was in mourning: not one, but wept a father, a brother, or a friend. The number of officers slain was prodigious; and could be compared to naught but their wives, who sollicited pensions. The closets of the ministers were beset with them. They pestered

the Sultan himself with petitions, in which the merit and services of the deceased, the grief of their widows, the dismal condition of their children, and other moving motives were not forgotten. Nothing seemed more equitable than their requests: but on what fund to ground pensions which amounted to millions?

The ministers, after having exhausted speeches, and sometimes peevishness and rough language, were obliged to deliberate on the means of bringing this affair to a final issue: but they had an excellent reason for concluding nothing: there was not a penny left.

Mangogul, tired with the false reasonings of his ministers and the lamentations of the widows, hit upon the expedient, which his ministry had been so long hunting after. “Gentlemen,” said he to his council, “I am of opinion that, before any pensions are granted, it would be proper to examine if they are lawfully due.” “This examination,” answered the great Seneschal, “will be immense, and of prodigious discussion. Yet how to resist the clamors and persecution of these women, by whom you, sir, are particularly teazed?” “It will not be as difficult a talk as you imagine, Mr. Seneschal,” replied the Sultan; “and I promise you that by to morrow noon the whole affair shall be terminated, by the laws of the strictest equity. Do you only bring them to my audience chamber by nine in the morning.”

The council broke up, the Seneschal went into his office, pondered profoundly, and drew up the following proclamation; which in three hours time was printed, published by sound of trumpet, and fixed up at all the most public places of Banza.

By the Sultan’s most excellent majesty, and my lord the grand Seneschal,

We Gander-beak, grand Seneschal of Congo, visir of the first bench, train-bearer to the great Manimonbanda, chief and super-intendant of the sweepers of the divan, give notice, that to-morrow morning at nine of the clock, the magnanimous Sultan will give audience to the widows of the

officers slain in his service, in order to decree, on sight of their pretensions, what to him shall seem meet. Given at our office the twelfth of the moon of Regeb, in the year 147200000009.

All the distressed women of Congo, and a great number of them there was, did not fail to read the proclamation, or to send their footmen to read it; and less still to be at the appointed hour, in the lobby of the audience chamber. “In order to avoid a crowd, let no more enter,” said the Sultan, “than six of these ladies at once. When we have heard them, let them pass thro’ the back door, which leads to the outward courts. You, gentlemen, be attentive, and pronounce on their demands.”

This said, he made a signal to the first gentleman usher of the audiences; and the six, who happen’d to be next the door, were introduced. They entered in long mourning robes, and made low reverences to his highness. Mangogul addressed the youngest and handsomest of them, whose name was Ifec. “Madam,” said he, “how long is it since you have lost your husband?” “Three months,” answered Ifec weeping. “He was lieutenant general in your highness’s service. He was kill’d in the last battle, and six children are the only legacy he left me”— “He left you?” interrupted a voice, which, tho’ issuing from Ifec, was not exactly in the same tone with her’s. “Madam knows better than she says. They were all begun and finished by a young Bramin, who daily came to comfort her, while my master was in the field.”

’Tis easy to guess, whence proceeded the indiscreet voice, which pronounced this answer. Poor Ifec, being put out of countenance, grew pale, trembled, fainted. “Madam is subject to the vapors,” said Mangogul with an air of tranquillity: “let her be carried into an appartment of the Seraglio, and be taken care of.” Then immediately addressing Phenice: “Madam,” said he, “was not your husband a Pacha?” “Yes, sir,” answered Phenice in a trembling voice. “And how have you lost him?” “Sir, he died in his bed,

quite exhausted with the fatigues of the last campaign”— “With the fatigues of the last campaign,” replied Phenice’s Toy. “Go, madam, your husband brought a firm and vigorous state of health from the camp; and he would still enjoy it, had not two or three scoundrel players, — you understand me, take care of yourself.” “Write,” says the Sultan, “that Phenice demands a pension, for the good services, which she has rendered to the state and her husband.”

A third was interrogated on her husband’s age and name, who was said to have died in the army of the small-pox. “Of the small pox,” said the Toy, “a fine story indeed: say, madam, of two good strokes of a scymeter which he received from the Sangiac Cavaglio, because he took it ill, that his eldest son was said to be as like the Sangiac, as one egg is to another: and madam knows as well as I,” added the Toy, “that a likeness was never better grounded.”

The fourth was going to speak without being interrogated by Mangogul, when her Toy was heard to cry out from the lower regions, that these ten years part, which the war had lasted, she had made pretty good use of her time; that two pages and a huge scoundrel of a footman had supplied her husband’s place; and that without doubt she designed the pension, which she was solliciting, for keeping an actor of the comic opera.

A fifth stept forward with intrepidity, and with an air of confidence demanded the reward of her late husband’s services, who was an aga of the Janissaries, and lost his life under the walls of Matatras. The Sultan turn’d his ring on her, but to no purpose. Her Toy was mute. “I must own,” says the African author, who had seen her, “that she was so ugly, that the by-standers would be astonished, if her Toy had any thing to say.”

Mangogul was got to the sixth, and here are the express words of her Toy. “Truly, it well becomes madam,” meaning her, whose Toy was obstinately silent, “to sollicite pensions, while she lives upon the poule,

keeps a breland table which brings her in three thousand sequins a year, makes private suppers at the expence of the gamesters, and received six hundred sequins from Osman, to draw me to one of these suppers, where the treacherous Osman — —"

"Due regard shall be paid to your petitions, ladies," said the Sultan: "for the present ye may withdraw." Then directing his words to his counsellors, he ask'd them, if it did not seem ridiculous to them to grant pensions to a herd of little bastards of Bramins and others, and to women whose employment it was to dishonor brave men, who had enter'd into his service in quest of glory, at the expence of their lives.

The Seneschal stood up, answered, declaimed, resumed, and gave his opinion obscurely as usual. While he was yet speaking, Ifec recovered from her fit, quite enraged at her adventure; and, as she expected no pension for herself, and would run distracted, if any other obtain'd one, which would have happened in all likelihood, she went directly into the antichamber, and whispered to two or three of her female friends, that they were summoned thither purely to hear their Toys chatter; that she herself heard one deliver horrid things in the audience chamber; that she would not name it for the world; but that they must be fools, to expose themselves to the same danger.

This advice passed from hand to hand, and dispersed the crowd of widows. When the gentleman usher opened the door to let in a second parcel, not one was there. "Well, Seneschal, will you believe me another time?" said Mangogul informed of the desertion, to the good man, clapping him on the shoulder. "I promised to rid you of these female weepers, and I have done it. Yet they were very assiduous in making court to you, notwithstanding your fourscore and fifteen years of age. But whatever pretensions you may possibly have: for I am not ignorant of the facility you had to form pretensions on these ladies, I fancy you are obliged to me for their retreat. They gave you more *embarras* than pleasure."

The African author informs us, that the remembrance of this trial is kept up in Congo; and for that reason it is, that the government is so sparing of granting pensions: but this was not the only good effect of Cucufa's ring, as we shall see in the following chapter.

CHAP. XXV. Twelfth Trial of the Ring.

A Law Case.



RAPES WERE SEVERELY punished in Congo: and there happened a most notorious one in Mangogul's reign. This prince, at his accession to the crown, had sworn, like all his predecessors, never to grant a pardon for that crime: but be laws ever so severe, they seldom curb those, whom a considerable advantage urges to infringe them. The criminal was condemned to lose that part of him, by which he had sinned; a cruel operation, of which he generally died; as the person who performed it, used less precaution than B —— ll.

Kerfael, a young man of a good family, had now languished six months in a dungeon, waiting for the day of execution. Fatme, a young pretty woman, was his Lucretia and accuser. Every body knew, that they had been very well together: Fatme's indulgent husband took no exceptions against it: therefore it would be ungenteel in the public to intermeddle in their affairs.

After an undisturbed commerce of two years, whether thro' inconstancy or disgust, Kerfael took to a dancer at the opera of Banza, and grew cold towards Fatme, yet without coming to an open rupture. He resolved to make a decent retreat; which obliged him to continue his visits in the house. Fatme enraged for being thus forsaken, meditated revenge, and made use of this remnant of his assiduities to destroy her unfaithful lover.

One day, that the convenient husband had left them *tête à tête*, and that Kerfael, having ungirt his scymeter, was endeavouring to allay Fatme's suspicions by protestations, which cost nothing to lovers, but never surprize the credulity of a jealous woman; she assumed an affrighted air, and having tore her dress at five or six pulls, shriek'd out horridly, and call'd to her

husband and domestics for help; who ran immediately, and became witnesses to the injury, which Fatme said she received from Kerfael; and shewing the scymeter, added: “This the infamous villain lifted at my head ten times to make me submit to his will.”

The young man, struck dumb at the blackness of the accusation, had not power either to answer or make his escape. He was seiz’d, dragg’d to prison, and deliver’d up to justice and the prosecution of the Cadilesker.

The laws ordained that Fatme should be visited. Accordingly she was; and the report of the matrons proved very unfavourable to the accused. They had an original standard, by which they could determine the condition of a violated woman; and every circumstance concurred against Kerfael. The judges examined him, Fatme was confronted with him, and the evidence was heard. In vain did he plead innocence, deny the fact, and demonstrate by the commerce which he held with his accuser above two years, that she was not a woman to be ravished. The circumstance of the scymeter, the *tête à tête* solitude, Kerfael’s confusion at the sight of the husband and domestics; taken all together formed, in the opinion of the judges, violent presumptions. Fatme on her side, far from owning that she had granted him favors, would not even allow that she gave him the least glimmering of hopes; and maintain’d that her obstinate adherence to her duty, from which she had never flinch’d, was without doubt what urged Kerfael to acquire by force, what he despair’d obtaining by craft. The verbal process drawn up by the commissaries was another terrible piece. Nothing more was requisite, than to run it over, and compare it with the articles of the Criminal Code, to read unhappy Kerfael’s condemnation therein. He lost all expectations of life either by his defence, or the credit of his family; the magistrates had fixed the definitive sentence to the thirteenth of the month of Rebeg: and this was even published by sound of trumpet, according to custom.

This affair became the topic of conversations, and people were divided upon it for a good while. Some old hags, who had always been very safe from any apprehensions of a rape, ran about crying: “That Kerfael’s attack was enormous; that unless a severe example were made of him, innocence would be no longer in security; and that an honest woman would be exposed to insults, even at the horns of the Altar.” Then they cited instances of little impertinent puppies having attack’d the virtue of several respectable ladies: and the circumstances left no room to doubt, but that those respectable ladies mentioned by them were themselves: and all these speeches were made to Bramins less innocent than Kerfael, and by devotes as chaste as Fatme, by way of edifying conversations.

The *Petits-Maitres* on the contrary, and even some *Petites-Maitresses*, asserted that a rape was a chimæra, that a woman never surrendered but by capitulation; and that, if a fort was defended, tho’ ever so little, it was absolutely impossible to take it by storm. Examples were alledged in support of this reasoning: the women knew some; the *Petits-Maitres* invented others; and there was no end of quoting instances of women, who had not been ravished. “Poor Kerfael,” said they, “what the devil had he in his head, to take to little Bimbreloqua,” which was the dancer’s name, “why did he not stick to Fatme? They were extremely well together, and the husband left them at full liberty: what a blessing —— Those witches the matrons put on their spectacles to no purpose, for they saw nothing. And indeed, who is the person that can see clear in that place? And besides, the senators are going to deprive him of his joy, for having burst an open door. The poor lad will die of it, no doubt. After that, pray consider, what will not dissatisfied women be authorized to do.” — — “If this execution takes place,” interrupted another, “I will make myself a free mason.”

Mirzoza, naturally compassionate, remonstrated to Mangogul, who was joking her on Kerfael’s case, that if the laws spoke against Kerfael, good

sense deposed against Fatme. “Moreover,” added she, “it has never been heard, that, in a wise government, the letter of the law should be so closely adhered to, that the simple allegation of a female accuser should be sufficient to endanger the life of a subject. The reality of a rape cannot be too clearly proved; and you will allow, Sir, that this fact is as much at least within the province of your ring as of your senators. It would be very singular, that the matrons should be more knowing on this head than the Toys themselves. Hitherto your highness’s ring has done little more than satisfy your curiosity. Might not the Genius, from whom you had it, have intended some more important end? If you employ it for the discovery of truth, and the happiness of your subjects, can you think the Genius will be offended? Try. You are in possession of an infallible method of drawing from Fatme a confession of her crime, or a proof of her innocence.” “You are in the right,” replied Mangogul, “and you shall be satisfied.”

The Sultan departed immediately: and indeed there was no time to lose: for it was the night of the twelfth of the moon Rebeg, and the senate was to pronounce sentence on the thirteenth. Fatme was just got into bed, the curtains were not quite closed. A night taper threw a dull light on her countenance. The Sultan thought her beautiful, notwithstanding the violent commotions which disfigured her. Compassion and hatred, grief and revenge, audaciousness and shame were painted in her eyes, according as they succeeded each other in her heart. She uttered deep sighs, shed tears, wiped them off, shed fresh ones, remained some moments with her head drooping and eyes dejected, then suddenly raised them, and darted furious looks towards the heavens. What was Mangogul doing all this time? He was talking to himself, and saying. “These are the symptoms of despair. Her former tenderness for Kerfael has revived in all its violence. She has lost sight of the offence he committed, and has nothing in view but the

punishment reserved for her lover." As soon as he had finished these words, he turned the fatal ring on Fatme, and her Toy cried out with vehemence.

"Twelve hours more, and we shall be revenged. The treacherous ingrateful man shall perish, and his blood shall be shed." Fatme affrighted at the extraordinary motion which she felt within her, and shock'd at the buzzing voice of her Toy, clapt both hands on it, and put herself upon duty to stop its mouth. But the powerful ring continued to act, and the ungovernable Toy breaking thro' every obstacle, added: "Yes, we shall be revenged. O! thou who hast betray'd me, wretched Kerfael, dye, and thou, whom he has preferred to me, O Bimbreloqua, despair! —— Twelve hours more! Alas! how tedious will this time appear to me. Hasten, sweet moments, when I shall see the treacherous, the ingrateful Kerfael under the executioner's knife, his blood trickling down —— Ah! Wretch, what have I said? Can I without horror see the dearest object of my love perish? Can I see the fatal weapon lifted up? —— Ah! far from me this cruel thought. — He hates me, 'tis true; he has quitted me for Bimbreloqua, but perhaps some time or other —— why do I say, perhaps? Love will certainly recall him under my yoke. That little Bimbreloqua is a fancy that will fly off; he must sooner or later be sensible of the injustice of his preference, and the ridiculousness of his new choice. Comfort thyself, Fatme, thou shalt see thy Kerfael again. Yes, thou shalt see him again. Arise quickly, run, fly to remove the dreadful danger which threatens him. Dost thou not tremble to come too late? — But whither shall I run, mean wretch that I am. Does not Kerfael's disdain foretel me, that he has abandoned me for ever. Bimbreloqua enjoys him, and 'tis for her that I was going to save him: ah! let him rather dye a thousand deaths. If he lives no more for me, why should I be concerned for his death? — Yes, I am now convinced that my wrath is just. The ingrateful Kerfael has deserved all my hatred. I no longer have any remorse. I had done every thing to keep him, I will do every thing to

destroy him. Yet one day later, and my revenge was disappointed. But his evil genius delivered him up to me, the very moment that he thought to escape me. He is fallen into the snare which I laid for him. I have him fast. The appointment, to which I contrived to bring thee, was the last which thou intendedst for me: but thou wilt not so soon forget it. — With what address did you bring him to your beck? Fatme, how well concerted was your disorder? Your shrieks, your grief, your tears, your confusion, every thing, even to your silence, has ruin'd Kerfael. Nothing can snatch him from his impending fate. Kerfael is dead — You weep, wretched woman. He loved another, of what consequence is his life to you."

Mangogul, filled with horror at this discourse, turned off his ring; and while Fatme was recruiting her spirits, he flew back to the Sultana. "Well, prince," said she, "what have you heard? Is Kerfael still guilty, and the chast Fatme"— "I beseech you to excuse me," answered the Sultan, "from repeating the abominations which I come from hearing. How an exasperated woman is to be dreaded! Who could believe, that a body formed by the graces, sometimes enclosed a heart molded by the furies? But the sun shall not set to-morrow on my dominions, before they be purged of a monster more dangerous than those which are produced in my deserts."

The Sultan immediately sent for the Seneschal, and commanded him to seize Fatme, to remove Kerfael into one of the appartments of the seraglio, and to inform the Senate, that he reserved to himself the cognizance of his affair. His orders were executed that very night.

The next morning at dawn of day, the Sultan attended by the Seneschal and an Effendi, went to Mirzoza's appartment, and had Fatme brought thither. This unfortunate woman threw herself at Mangogul's feet, confessed her crime with all its circumstances, and conjured Mirzoza to intercede for her. Mean while Kerfael was conducted in. He expected nothing but death: however he made his appearance with that composed

assurance, which innocence alone can give. Some ill-natured wags said, that he would be in greater consternation, if what he was threaten'd to lose, was worth preserving. The women were upon the tenters to know the issue. He prostrated himself respectuously before his highness. Mangogul made him a signal to arise, and giving him his hand, "You are innocent," said he, "be free. Render thanks to Brama for your preservation. In order to make amends for the misery you have suffered, I grant you a pension of two thousand sequins on my exchequer, and the first commandery that shall fall in the order of the Crocodile."

The more favors were bestowed on Kerfael, the more Fatme dreaded punishment. The great Seneschal gave his opinion for death, grounded upon the law: *Si foemina ff. de vi C. calumniatrix*. The Sultan was inclined for perpetual imprisonment. Mirzoza finding too much rigor in one of these judgments, and too much indulgence in the other, condemned Fatme's Toy to the padlock. The Florentine machine was publickly clapt on, upon the same scaffold that had been erected for Kerfael's execution. Thence she was conducted to a house of correction, together with the matrons who had given their decisive opinions with so much knowledge.

CHAP. XXVI. Mirzoza's Metaphysics.

The Souls.



WHILE MANGOGUL WAS interrogating the Toys of Haria, the widows, and Fatme, Mirzoza had full time to prepare her philosophical lecture. One evening, that the Manimonbanda was performing her devotions, that there was neither play nor drawing room at court, and that the favorite was almost certain of a visit from the Sultan; she took two black petticoats, put one on in the usual manner, and the other over her shoulders, passed her hands thro' the two slits, put on the peruke of Mangogul's Seneschal, and his chaplain's square cap; and thought herself equipped as a philosopher, whereas she had disguised herself into a bat.

In this masquerade dress, she walked up and down her appartments, as a professor of the royal college waiting for his scholars. She affected even to the gloomy pensive physiognomy of a learned man in meditation. Mirzoza did not hold this forced gravity long. The Sultan entered with some of his courtiers, and made a low bow to the new philosopher; whose gravity disconcerted her audience, and was in its turn disconcerted by the loud laughter it occasioned. "Madam," said Mangogul, "have you not advantage enough by your wit and figure, without taking the robe to your aid? without which your words would have all the weight that you could have desired." "It seems to me, sir," answered Mirzoza, "that you do not much respect this robe, and that a disciple should pay more regard to what constitutes half the merit at least of his master." "I perceive," replied the Sultan, "that you have already acquired the spirit and tone of your new condition. I make no doubt at present, but your capacity answers to the dignity of your dress, and I impatiently expect a proof of it."— "You shall be satisfied this minute,"

said Mirzoza, sitting down in the center of a large carpet. The Sultan and courtiers placed themselves around her, and she began.

“Have the philosophers, who presided over your highness’s education, ever entertain’d you on the nature of the soul?” “Oh! very often,” said Mangogul; “but all their systems had no other end, but giving me uncertain notions of it; and were it not for an inward sentiment, which seems to suggest to me, that it is a substance different from matter, I should either have denied its existence, or confounded it with the body. Would you undertake to clear up this chaos?”

“So far from it,” replied Mirzoza, “that I am not farther advanced on that head than your pedagogues. The only difference between them and me, is that I suppose the existence of a substance different from matter, and that they hold it demonstrated. But this substance, if it exists, must be lodged somewhere. Have they not preached many extravagances to you on that article?”

“No,” said Mangogul: “they all pretty generally agreed, that it resides in the head; and this opinion to me seemed probable. ’Tis the head that thinks, imagines, reflects, judges, disposes, commands; and we say every day of a man who does not think, that he has no brains, or that he wants a head.”

“Well then,” replied the Sultana, “the result of your long studies and of all your philosophy, is, to suppose a fact, and to ground it on popular expressions. Prince, what would you say of your first geographer, if he presented your highness with a map of your dominions, in which he had put the east in the west, and the north in the south?”

“That is too gross an error,” answered Mangogul, “for any geographer to have ever committed.”

“That may be,” continued the favorite; “and in the case before us, your philosophers are greater bunglers, than the most bungling geographer can be. They had not a vast empire to survey; the business was not to fix the

limits of the four parts of the world: all they had to do, was to enter into themselves, and there mark the true seat of their soul. Yet they have placed the east in the west, and the south in the north. They have pronounced that the soul is in the head, whereas the greatest part of mankind dye, without it's ever inhabiting that appartment; and its first residence is in the feet."

"In the feet!" interrupted the Sultan. "That is the most empty notion that I have ever heard."

"Yes, in the feet," replied Mirzoza, "and this opinion, which to you seems so silly, will, upon thoroughly examining it, become rational; contrary to all those, which you allow as true, and which upon a thorough examination are found to be false. Your highness agreed with me just now, that the existence of our soul was founded on the interior testimony alone, which it bore to itself; and I will now demonstrate, that all the proofs imaginable of sense concur to fix the soul in the seat which I have assigned it."

"There we expect you," said Mangogul.

"I desire no favor," continued she; "and I invite ye all to propose your difficulties. Well then, I was saying that the soul takes up its first residence in the feet, that there it begins to exist, and from the feet it advances into the body. To experience I appeal for this fact; and perhaps I am going to lay the first foundations of experimental metaphysics.

"We have all experienced in our infancy, that the benumbed soul remains whole months in a state of sleepiness. At that time the eyes open without seeing, the mouth without speaking, and the ears without hearing. 'Tis elsewhere that the soul endeavours to stretch itself and awake; 'tis in other members that she practises her first functions. 'Tis by the feet that a child gives notice of his formation. His body, head and arms are immoveable in the mother's womb; but his feet unfold and extend themselves, and give proofs of his existence, and perhaps of his exigences. When he is on the

point of birth, what would become of his head, body and arms? They would never come out of their confinement, had they not been assisted by the feet: here the feet act the principal part, and drive the rest of the body before them. Such is the order of nature; and whenever any other member attempts to lead the van; when the head, for example, takes the place of the feet; every thing goes wrong, and God knows what is the consequence sometimes, both to the mother and the child.

“Is the child born? ’tis still in the feet that the chief motions are performed. We are obliged to confine them: and this is never done without some reluctance on their part. The head is a block, with which we do what we will; but the feet are sensible of, shake off the yoke, and seem jealous of the liberty, of which they are deprived.

“Is the child able to stand alone? the feet make a thousand efforts to move; they put every thing into action: they command the other members, and the obedient hands lean against the walls, and advance forward to prevent or break the falls, and facilitate the action of the feet.

“Whither do all the thoughts of a child tend, what are his pleasures, when, secure on his legs, his feet have acquired the habit of moving? To exercise them, to go to and fro’, to run, to leap, to bounce. This turbulence pleases us, we take it for a mark of sense; and we predict the future stupidity of the child, when we see him indolent and sullen. Have you a mind to vex a child of four years old? make him sit down for a quarter of an hour, or imprison him between four chairs: he will grow peevish and ill-humor’d: for ’tis not his legs alone that you deprive of exercise, ’tis his soul that you hold in captivity.

“The soul remains in the feet to the age of two or three years; at four it inhabits the legs; it gets up to the knees and thighs at fifteen. Then we love dancing, fencing, riding, and the other violent bodily exercises. This is the predominant passion of all young folks, and the madness of some. What!

does not the soul reside in those places, where she almost only manifests herself, and where she feels the most agreeable sensations? But if her residence varies in infancy and youth, why should it not vary thro' every stage of life?"

Mirzoza pronounced this discourse with such rapidity as made her pant. Selim, one of the Sultan's favorites, embraced the moment while she was taking breath, and said to her: "Madam, I will make use of the liberty you have granted the company, of proposing their objections. Your system is ingenious, and you have delivered it with equal grace and clearness: but I am not so far seduced by it, as to think it stands demonstrated. Methinks one may say, that even in infancy 'tis the head that commands the feet, and from thence the spirits flow, which, by means of the nerves, running into all the members, stop or move them at the will of the soul seated on the pineal gland: just as we see his highness's orders issuing from the sublime Porte, which set all his subjects in action."

"Doubtless," replied Mirzoza, "but one would tell me a very obscure thing; to which I should give no other answer than by an experienced fact. In infancy we have no certainty that the head thinks; and even you, my lord, who have so good an one, and who in your tender years passed for a prodigy of reason, do you remember that you thought at that time? But you might well assert, that when you gamboled about like a little Dæmon, so as to drive your governants out of their wits, your feet then governed your head."

"That proves nothing," said the Sultan. "Selim was lively, and so are a thousand other children. They do not reflect, but they think: time slips away, the remembrance of things wears out, and they remember not that they thought."

"But by what part did they think," replied Mirzoza: "for that is the point in dispute?"

“By the head,” answered Selim.

“What! always this head, into which one cannot peep,” replied the Sultana. “Pray, drop your dark lanthorn, in which you suppose a light, that is seen by none but by him who carries it: hear my experiment, and own the truth of my hypothesis. It is so constantly true, that the soul begins its progress in the body by the feet, that there are some of both sexes, in whom it never rose higher. My lord, you have admired Nini’s nimbleness and Saligo’s feats of activity a thousand times: answer me then sincerely, do you think that these creatures have their souls any where else but in their legs? And have you not remarked, that in Volucer and Zelindor the head is submissive to the feet? The eternal temptation of a dancer is to contemplate his legs. At every step his attentive eye follows his paces, and his head bows respectuously before his feet, as do before his highness his invincible Pacha’s.”

“I allow the observation,” said Selim: “but I deny that it is a general one.”

“Nor do I pretend,” replied Mirzoza, “that the soul always fixes in the feet: she advances, she travels, she quits a part, returns to it, and quits it again; but I maintain that the other members are subordinate to that which she inhabits. All this varies according to the age, temper and circumstances; and thence arises the difference of tastes, the diversity of inclinations and characters. Do you not admire the fecundity of my principle? And is not its certainty evinced by the number of phænomena, to which it extends?”

“Madam,” answered Selim, “if you applied it to some in particular, perhaps it might give us a degree of conviction, which we have not yet acquired.”

“Most willingly,” replied Mirzoza, who began to be sensible of the advantages she gain’d: “you shall be satisfied, only follow the chain of my notions. I do not pretend to make arguments in form. I speak from my heart;

this is the philosophy of our sex, and you understand it almost as well as we. It is probable enough," added she, "that the soul occupies the feet and legs to the age of eight or ten: but about that time, or rather later, she quits that lodging, either of her own free motion, or by force. By force, when a tutor employs certain machines to drive her out of her native place, and lead her into the brain; where she is metamorphosed generally into memory, and seldom or never into judgment. This is the fate of school-boys. In like manner, if a weak governant labours hard to form a young girl, stuffs her mind with knowledge, and neglects the heart and morals; the soul rapidly flies towards the head, stops on the tongue, or fixes in the eyes; and her scholar is but a tiresome pratler, or a coquet.

"Thus the voluptuous woman is she whose soul occupies her Toy, and never strays from it.

"The woman of gallantry, she whose soul is sometimes in her Toy, and sometimes in her eyes.

"The affectionate woman, she whose soul is habitually in the heart, but sometimes also in her Toy.

"The virtuous woman, she whose soul is sometimes in her head, sometimes in her heart, but never any where else.

"If the soul fixes in the heart, she forms the characters of sensibility, compassion, truth, generosity. If she quits the heart without returning thither, and retires to the head; then she forms those whom we call hardhearted, ungrateful, deceitful, cruel men.

"The class of those, in whom the soul visits the head merely as a country-house, where its stay is short, is very numerous. It is composed of *Petits-Maitres*, coquets, musicians, poets, romancers, courtiers, and all those who are called pretty women. Listen to the reasoning of these entities, and you will instantly discern vagabond souls, which are influenced by the different climes they inhabit."

“If that be the case,” said Selim, “nature has formed many useless things. And yet our sages hold as a constant maxim, that she has produced nothing in vain.”

“Drop your sages and their lofty expressions,” answered Mirzoza; “and as to nature, let us consider her with the eyes of experience only, and we shall learn from her, that she has placed the soul in the body of man, as in a spacious palace, of which she does not always occupy the most beautiful appartment. The head and heart are principally destined for her, as the center of virtue, and the residence of truth: but most commonly she stops on the road, and prefers a garret, a suspicious place, a miserable inn, where she drops asleep in perpetual drunkenness. Ah! If I were allowed for twenty-four hours only, to settle the world according to my fancy, I would divert you with a very strange sight: in a moment I would deprive each soul of the superfluous parts of its habitation; and you would see each individual characterised by the part left him. Thus dancers would be reduced to two feet, or two legs at most; singers to a throat; most women to a Toy; hero’s and prize-fighters to an armed hand; certain learned men to a skull without brains; a female gamester should be stinted to two hands incessantly shuffling the cards; a glutton to two jaws always in motion; a coquet to two eyes; a rake to the sole instrument of his passion; the ignorant and lazy to nothing.”

“If you leave the women any hands at all,” interrupted the Sultan, “those men whom you would reduce to the sole instrument of their passions, would be pursued. This chace would be a pleasant sight: and if the sex was as greedy of this game every where else as in Congo, the species would soon be extinct.”

“But,” said Selim to the favorite, “of what would you compose affectionate and sensible women, constant and faithful lovers?”

“Of a heart,” answered Mirzoza; “and I well know,” added she, darting a tender glance on Mangogul, “that, to which mine would wish to be united.”

The Sultan could not stand against this declaration: he sprung from his seat to the favorite: the courtiers disappear’d, and the new philosopher’s chair became the theatre of their pleasures: he gave her repeated proofs that he was not less charmed with her sentiments than with her discourse; and the philosophic equipage was thrown into disorder. Mirzoza return’d the black petticoats to her women, sent my lord Seneschal his enormous peruke, and to *Monsieur l’Abbé* his square cap, with assurances that he should be on the list at the next nomination. What would he not have attained, if he had been a genius? A seat in the academy was the least reward that he could expect: but unluckily he knew but two or three hundred words, and had never been able from that stock, to compass the composing of two *Ritournelles*.

CHAP. XXVII. Sequel of the preceding conversation.



MANGOGUL WAS THE only person that had given attention to Mirzoza's philosophic lecture without interrupting her; and as he was pretty much inclined to contradict, she was astonish'd at it. "Does the Sultan allow my system from beginning to end?" said she within herself. "No, that is not probable: has he found it too bad to deign to attack it? that may be. My notions are not the most just that have been broach'd to this day; I grant it: but neither are they the most false; and I am apt to think that worse have been invented."

In order to clear up this doubt, the favorite resolved to ask some questions of Mangogul. "Well, prince," said she, "what are your thoughts of my system?" "It is admirable," answered the Sultan; "I find but one defect in it." "What defect is that?" replied the favorite. "It is," said Mangogul, "that it is as false as false can be. Pursuant to your notions, we must all be endowed with souls: now observe, my soul's delight, that there is not common sense in this supposition. I have a soul: there is an animal that acts most part of the time as if he had none; and perhaps in reality he has none, even while he acts as if he had one. But he has a nose made like mine; I feel that I have a soul, and that I think: therefore that animal has a soul, and thinks likewise. This argument has been made use of above a thousand years, and it has been impertinent full as long."

"I own," said the favorite, "that it is not always evident that others think." "And add," replied Mangogul, "that it is evident on an hundred occasions that they do not think." "But in my opinion," says Mirzoza, "it would be going a great length, to infer from thence, that they never have or ever will think. A person is not always a beast, for having been so sometimes; and your highness — —"

Mirzoza, fearing to offend the Sultan, stopt short. “Continue, madam,” said Mangogul, “I understand you; would you not have said, has my highness never acted the beast? I answer you, that I have now and then, and that even I excused others for taking me for such: for you may easily imagine, that they did not fail so to do, tho’ they dared not to speak out.” —— “Ah! prince,” cried the favorite, “if men refused a soul to the greatest monarch upon earth, to whom could they allow one?”

“Pray, forbear compliments,” says Mangogul. “I have for a moment laid down the crown and scepter. I have ceased to be Sultan, in order to be a philosopher, and I can hear and speak the truth. I believe I have given you proofs of the one; and you have hinted to me, without offending me, and quite at your ease, that I have been sometimes no better than a beast. Permit me thoroughly to fulfil the duties of my new character.

“Far from agreeing with you,” continued he, “that every creature that has legs, arms, hands, eyes and ears as I have, possesses a soul like me; I declare to you, that I am absolutely perswaded, that three fourths of the men and all the women are but mere machines.”

“There may possibly be as much truth,” answered the favorite, “as politeness in what you say.”

“Oh!” says the Sultan, “madam seems to be angry: and why the devil do you take it into your head to philosophize, if you will not allow one to speak the truth? Is it in the schools that politeness is to be sought for? I have left you full elbow-room; pray, allow me the same, if you please. Well, then, I was saying, that ye are all beasts.”

“Yes, prince; and this is what remained to be proved,” added Mirzoza.

“Nothing more easy,” answered the Sultan. Then he set about detailing all the impertinences which had been said over and over, with as little wit and delicacy as possible, against a sex which possesses both these qualities in a sovereign degree. Never was Mirzoza’s patience put to a greater trial;

and you would never be so tired in your whole life, as if I related all Mangogul's reasonings. This prince, who did not want good sense, was that day absurd beyond all comprehension: of which you shall be a judge. "It is so true, by Jupiter," said he, "that a woman is but an animal, that I'll wager, if I turn Cucufa's ring on my mare, I shall make her speak like a woman."

"Without doubt," answered Mirzoza, "there is the strongest argument that has ever been, or ever will be made against us." Then she burst out into a loud fit of laughter. Mangogul, vexed to see no end to her laughter, went out in a hurry, resolved to try the whimsical experiment, which occur'd to his imagination.



The mare of Sultan Mangogul.

CHAP. XXVIII. Thirteenth trial of the Ring.

The Little Mare.



I AM NOT a great portrait-maker. I have exempted the reader from that of the favorite Sultana; but I can never condescend to remit him that of the Sultan's mare. She was of a middling size, and had a pretty good gait; the chief fault found with her in that regard was, that she did not bridle her head sufficiently. Her colour was white, with blue eyes, small hoofs, clean legs, firm hams, and light haunches. She had been taught to dance for a long time, and she made her bows like a master of the ceremonies. Upon the whole she was a pretty beast enough, and remarkably gentle: she was easily mounted, but one must be an excellent horseman to be able to keep the saddle. She had belong'd to the senator Aaron: but on a fine evening the skittish creature took fright, threw the judge, and ran full speed to the Sultan's studs, carrying with her the saddle, bridle, furniture, housings and caparisons of value; which became her so well, that it was not thought proper to send them back.

Mangogul went into his stables, accompanied by his first secretary Ziguezague. "Listen attentively," said he, "and write." —— That very instant he turn'd his ring on the mare, which fell to leaping, prancing, kicking, bouncing, and neighing under the tail. — — "Where are your thoughts," said the prince to his secretary, "write then." — — "Sultan," replied Ziguezague, "I wait till your highness begins." — — "My mare," says Mangogul, "will dictate to you this once, write."

Ziguezague, whom this order reduced too low in his own opinion, assumed the liberty of representing to the Sultan, that he would always esteem it a high honour to be his secretary, but not that of his mare. "Write,

I tell you," said the Sultan again. "Prince, I cannot," replied Ziguezague: "I know not the orthography of this sort of words." — — "Write however," said the Sultan once more — — "I am excessively mortified, to be obliged to disobey your highness," added Ziguezague; "but" — — "But you are a scoundrel," interrupted Mangogul, incensed at a refusal so much out of place; "quit my palace, and never appear there more."

Poor Ziguezague disappear'd, having learn'd by experience, that a man of spirit ought not to enter the palaces of most part of the great, without leaving his sentiments at the gate. His deputy was called. He was a Provencal, frank, honest, and thoroughly disinterested. He flew whither he thought his duty and fortune called him, made a low bow to the Sultan, a lower still to his mare, and wrote every thing that the beast vouchsafed to dictate.

I must beg leave to refer those, who are curious to know her discourse, to the archives of Congo. This prince immediately ordered copies of it to be distributed among all his interpreters and professors of foreign languages, both ancient and modern. One said, that it was a scene of some old Greek tragedy, which to him appear'd very moving; another, by the strength of his genius discovered, that it was an important fragment of Egyptian theology: a third pretended, that it was the Exordium of Hannibal's funeral oration in the Punic language; and a fourth asserted, that the piece was writ in Chinese, and that it was a very devout prayer to Confucius.

While the Litterati were trying the Sultan's patience with their learned conjectures, he recollected Gulliver's travels, and made no doubt, but that a person, who had lived so long as this Englishman, in an island, where horses have a government, laws, kings, gods, priests, a religion, temples and altars, and who seemed so perfectly well instructed in their manners and customs, was a thorough master of their language. Accordingly Gulliver read and interpreted the mare's discourse off hand, notwithstanding the

orthographical errors, with which it abounded. Nay, it is the only good translation of it in all Congo. Mangogul learned for his own private satisfaction, and for the honour of his system, that it was an historical abridgment of the amours of an old Pacha of three tails with the little mare, which had been attack'd by an infinite number of jack-asses before him: a singular anecdote, the truth of which however was not unknown, either to the Sultan, or to any other person at court, at Banza, and in the rest of the empire.



The dream of Sultan Mangogul.

CHAP. XXIX. The best perhaps, and the least read of this history.

Mangogul's dream, or a voyage into the region of hypotheses.



"WAA," SAYS MANGOGUL, yawning and rubbing his eyes, "my head achs. Let nobody evermore talk philosophy to me. Such conversations are unwholsome. Last night I lay on empty ideas; and instead of sleeping like a Sultan, my brain work'd more than those of my ministers do in a year. You laugh; but to convince you that I do not exaggerate, and to take my revenge for the bad night which your reasonings gave me, I enjoin you the penance of hearing my dream in its full extent.

"As soon as I began to nod, and my imagination to take its flight, I saw an odd animal bounce by my side. He had the head of an eagle, the feet of a griffon, the body of a horse, and the tail of a lion. I seized him, notwithstanding his prancing; and holding by his mane, I nimbly sprung on his back. Immediately he spread out long wings, which issued from his flanks, and I felt myself carried in the air with incredible swiftness.

"After driving a vast way, I espied, in the emptiness of space, a building suspended as by enchantment. It was a vast one. I will not say that it was faulty in its foundation; for it had none. Its columns, which were not half a foot in diameter, ran up out of sight, and supported arches, which would not have been visible, were it not for the symmetrical lights made in them.

"At the entrance into this edifice it was that my beast first stop'd. At first I was in a doubt whether I should alight: for I apprehended less danger in sitting on my hippogriffon, than in walking under this portico. However, encouraged by the multitude of its inhabitants, and by a remarkable

security, which was predominant in their countenances, I alight, go forward, mix with the crowd, and make my observations on those that composed it.

“They were old men, either bloated or feeble; without *Embonpoint* and strength, and almost all deform’d. The head of one was too little, the arms of another too short. One was hump-back’d, another bandy-legg’d. Most of them had no feet, and walk’d on crutches. A breath threw them down, and they remain’d on the ground, till some new comer was pleased to lift them up. All these defects notwithstanding, they pleased at first sight. They had in their physiognomy somewhat engaging and confident. They were almost naked: for all their cloathing consisted of a small rag of stuff, which did not cover the hundredth part of their body.

“I continued to pierce the crowd, and got to the foot of a rostrum, for which a cobweb served as a canopy. The boldness of this rostrum was of a piece with that of the building. To me it seemed placed on the point of a needle, and to support itself there in æquilibrio. I trembled a hundred times for the person, who was in it. He was an old man, with a long beard, as wither’d and naked as any of his disciples: he had a cup full of a subtil fluid before him, into which he dipp’d a straw-pipe; then put it to his mouth, and blew bubbles to a crowd of spectators around him, who were using their utmost endeavours to drive them up to the clouds.

“‘Where am I?’ said I to myself, all in confusion at these childish tricks. ‘What means this blower of bubbles, and all these decrepit infants employ’d in making them fly about? Who will let me into the secret of these things?’ — Besides, the little scraps of stuff had struck me; and I observed that the larger they were, the less those that wore them interested themselves in the bubbles. This singular remark embolden’d me to accost him, who was the least undress’d of the company.

“I saw one, whose shoulders were half covered with pieces so well fitted together, that the seams were not to be seen. He walk’d forward and

backward in the crowd, with very little concern for what they were doing. He had an affable air, a smiling mouth, a noble gait, a mild look; and I went directly to him, and asked him without ceremony: ‘Who are you? Where am I? And who are all these folks?’ — He answered, ‘I am Plato. You are in the region of hypotheses, and these folks are systematics.’ ‘But by what chance,’ replied I, ’is the divine Plato here, and what does he do among these madmen?’— ‘Raising recruits,’ said he. ‘At a distance from this Portico I have a sanctuary, whither I conduct those who abandon systems.’ ‘And how do you employ them?’ ‘In knowing man, practising virtue, and sacrificing to the graces’— ‘These are noble employments: but what mean these shreds of fluff, whereby you look more like beggers than philosophers?’— ‘Oh! what a question do you propose to me,’ said he with a sigh, ‘and what thoughts do you bring back to my mind? This temple was formerly that of philosophy. Alas! how much this place is changed! The chair of Socrates was here.’— ‘How,’ said I, interrupting him, ‘had Socrates a straw, and did he blow bubbles?’— ‘No, no,’ replied Plato, ‘it was not by such means that he merited of the Gods the name of the wisest of men. His constant occupation, during life, was forming heads and hearts. The secret was lost at his death. Socrates died, and the bright days of philosophy were no more. These pieces of stuff, which those very systematics think it an honour to wear, are scraps of his garment. Scarcely had his eyes been closed, when those, who aspired to the title of philosophers, seized his robe, and tore it in pieces.’ ‘I understand,’ said I, ‘these pieces served as tickets both to them and their long posterity.’— ‘Who will collect these scraps,’ continued Plato, ‘and restore us Socrates’s robe?

“While he was uttering these words, I saw at a distance a child walking towards us in a slow but sure pace. He had a little head, slender body, weak arms and short legs: but all these parts increased in all dimensions, according as he came forward. In the progress of his successive growth, he

appear'd to me under a hundred different forms; I saw him directing a long telescope towards the heavens, estimating the fall of bodies by means of a pendulum, determining the weight of the air by a tube fill'd with quicksilver, and discomposing light with a prism. He was now become an enormous Colossus: his head touch'd the heavens, his feet were lost in the abyss, and his arms reach'd from one to the other pole. With his right hand he brandished a torch, whose light spread a vast way in the sky, enlightened even the bottom of the waters, and penetrated into the entrails of the earth. I ask'd Plato, what that gigantic figure was, that was coming towards us. 'It is experience,' said he. Scarcely had he made me this short answer, when I saw experience draw near, and the columns of the portico of hypotheses to shake, its arches to sink in, and its pavement to crack under our feet. 'Let us fly,' said Plato, 'let us fly: this edifice has but a moment to stand.' At these words he departs, and I follow him. The Colossus arrives, strikes the portico, it tumbles down with a frightful noise, and I awake."

"Ah! Prince," cried Mirzoza, "'tis you that ought to dream. I would indeed be very glad, that you had had a good night: but now that I know your dream, I should be very sorry that you had not dream'd it."

"Madam," said Mangogul, "I could point out nights better spent than that of this dream, which gives you so much pleasure; and if I had been master of making the journey, or not; it is very probable, that, not hoping to find you in the country of hypotheses, I should have bent my course elsewhere. And then, either I should not have the head-ach, which I actually feel, or at least I should have reason to make myself easy under it."

"Prince," replied Mirzoza, "it is to be hoped, that it will soon go off; and that one or two experiments of your ring will rid you of it." "I must try," said Mangogul. The conversation lasted some time longer between the Sultan and Mirzoza; so that he did not quit her till eleven, when he went upon the expedition related in the following chapter.

CHAP. XXX. Fourteenth trial of the Ring.

The mute Toy.



OF ALL THE ladies, who shone at the Sultan's court, none had more charms and wit than young Egle, the wife of his highness's great cupbearer. She was of all Mangogul's parties, who was much taken with the chearfulness of her conversation: and as if there could be neither pleasure nor amusement without Egle, she was also of all the parties of the grandees of his court. Balls, public diversions, drawing rooms, feasts, private suppers, hunting matches, play, every where Egle was invited, and every where she appear'd: it seem'd as if the taste of amusements multiplied her, according to the will of those who desired her company. Wherefore it is needless to say, that if no woman was as much sought after as Egle, there was none so diffused.

She had been always pursued by a crowd of lovers, and people were persuaded that she had not treated them all with severity. Whether it were inadvertence, or thorough good nature, her common politeness frequently resembled premeditated regard: and those who endeavour'd to gain her, sometimes read affection in her eyes, when she never intended more than affability. Neither caustic, nor detracting, she never open'd her mouth but to say pleasing things: which she did with such spirit and vivacity, that on several occasions, her encomiums raised a suspicion that she had a choice to justify. Thus it appears, that those, of whom Egle was the ornament and delight, were unworthy of her.

It was natural to think, that a woman, in whom no fault perhaps was to be found, but an excess of goodness, ought to have no enemies. Yet she had some, and very bitter ones. The devouts of Banza found that she had too

free an air, and somewhat too loose in her carriage; saw nothing in her conduct but a rage of worldly pleasures; inferred thence, that her morals were equivocal at least, and charitably insinuated this to all those that would hear them.

The court ladies did not treat Egle with greater tenderness. They suspected her intimacies, gave her gallants, even honored her with some great adventures, made her a party concerned in others: they knew particulars, and quoted witnesses. “Good,” whispered they, “she has been surprized *tête à tête* with Melraim in one of the groves of the great park. Egle does not want wit,” added they; “but Melraim has too much good sense to be amused with her speeches alone, at ten at night, in a grove.”— “You are mistaken,” said a *Petit-Maitre*, “I have walked with her a hundred times in the dusk of the evening, and found my account in it. But *à propos*, do you know that Zulemar is daily at her toilette?”— “Doubtless, we know it, and that she has no toilette but when her husband is in waiting at court.” — — “Poor Celebi,” continued another, “indeed his wife advertises him by the aigrette and diamond buckles, which she received of the pacha Ismael.” — — “Is that true, madam?” — — “It is strict truth, I have it from her own mouth: but in the name of Brama let this go no farther. Egle is my friend, and I should be very sorry” — — “Alas,” cried a third sorrowfully, “the poor little creature ruins herself very chearfully. A great pity truly. But twenty intrigues at a time, that seems rather too much.”

The *Petits-Maitres* were not more sparing of her. One related a hunting match, in which she and he lost themselves together. Another, out of respect for the sex, suppress’d the consequences of a very smart conversation he held with her at a masquerade, where he met her. A third made a panegyric on her wit and charms, and ended it by shewing her portrait, which he declared he had from the best hands. “This portrait,” said a fourth, “is more like her than that, of which she made a present to Jenaki.”

These stories at length came to her husband's ears. Celebi loved his wife, but still with such decency, that no body had the least suspicion of it. He repulsed the first reports, but they return'd to the charge from so many quarters, that he thought his friends more clear-sighted than himself: and the more liberty he had granted to Egle, the more he suspected that she had abused it. Jealousy took possession of his soul. He began by cramping his wife. Egle bore this change of behaviour with the greater impatience, as she was conscious of her innocence. Her vivacity and the advices of her female friends, hurried her into inconsiderate deportment, which made all the appearances turn against her, and had like to cost her her life. The violent Celebi for some time rack'd his brain with a thousand projects of revenge, steel, poison, the fatal noose, &c. and at length resolved on a slower and more cruel punishment, by confining her to his country seat: which is death indeed to a court lady. In a word, orders are given: Egle is inform'd of her destiny: he is insensible to her tears and deaf to her reasons, and she is banish'd two hundred miles from Banza, to an old castle, where she is allowed no other company than two maids and four black eunuchs, who continually watch her.

Scarcely was she set out, when she was innocent. The *Petits-Maitres* forgot her adventures; the women forgave her her wit and charms, and all the world bemoaned her. Mangogul was apprized, from Celebi's own mouth, of his motives for the dreadful resolution he had taken against his wife, and seem'd to be the only person that approved it.

The wretched Egle had already groaned near six months under her exile, when Kerfael's adventure happened. Mirzoza wish'd she might prove innocent, but durst not indulge those flattering hopes. However, she one day said to the Sultan: "Prince, might not your ring, which has saved Kerfael's life, put an end to Egle's banishment? But I forget myself: in order to that, her Toy should be consulted; and the poor recluse is dying with grief two

hundred miles hence." — — "You interest yourself much," answered Mangogul, "in Egle's fate." "Yes Prince," said Mirzoza; "especially if she is innocent." "You shall have tydings of this affair within an hour," replied Mangogul. "Do you not remember the properties of my ring?" —— At these words, he went into the garden, turn'd his ring, and in less than fifteen minutes was in the park of the castle wherein Egle dwelt.

There he espied Egle alone and overwhelm'd with sorrow: her head was leaning on her hand, she was tenderly repeating her husband's name, and with her tears she was watering the green turf, on which she sate. Mangogul drawing near turn'd his ring on her, and Egle's Toy said in a mournful strain: "I love Celebi." The Sultan waited for the sequel; but as it came not, he had recourse to his ring, which he rubb'd two or three times against his hat, before he levell'd it on Egle: but his labour was vain. The Toy repeated: "I love Celebi," and stop'd short. "There is a very discreet Toy," said the Sultan. "Let us try once more, and ply it closer." Whereupon he gave to his ring all the energy, which it was capable of receiving, and turn'd it nimbly on Egle: but her Toy continued mute. It either constantly kept silence, or broke it only by repeating these plaintive words: "I love Celebi, and have never loved any other man."

Mangogul, being thoroughly satisfied, returned to Mirzoza in fifteen minutes. "What, Prince," said she, "return'd already. Well, what have you learnt? Do you bring fresh matter for our conversations?" "I bring nothing," answered the Sultan. "What! nothing?"— "Nothing at all. I never knew a Toy so silent: I could get nothing from it but these words. 'I love Celebi, I love Celebi, and have never loved any other man.'" "Ah! Prince," replied Mirzoza with vivacity, "what do you tell me? What happy news! There is one virtuous woman found at last. Will you suffer her to remain longer miserable?" "No," answered Mangogul: "her banishment shall be at an end, but have you no apprehensions that it may be at the expence of her virtue?

Egle is chaste, but consider, my heart's delight, what you require of me; to re-call her to my court, in order that she may continue so: however you shall be satisfied."

The Sultan sent for Celebi immediately, and told him; that having made a strict inquiry into the reports spread abroad concerning Egle, he had found them false and calumnious, and commanded him to bring her back to court. Celebi obey'd, and presented his wife to Mangogul: she was going to throw herself at his highness's feet, but the Sultan stopping her said: "Madam, thank Mirzoza. Her friendship for you determined me to clear up the truth of the facts imputed to you. Continue to embellish my court; but remember that a pretty woman sometimes does herself as much mischief by acts of imprudence, as by adventures."

The very next day Egle waited on the Manimonbanda, who received her with a smile. The *Petits-Maitres* redoubled their insipidities towards her, and the women all ran to embrace and give her joy, and began again to tear her in pieces.

End of the First Volume.

Les Bijoux Indiſcrets.

OR, THE

Indiſcreet Toys.

Tranſlated from the

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CHAP. XXXI. Was Mangogul in the right?



FROM THE TIME that Mangogul had received the fatal present of Cucufa, the ridicules and vices of the sex were become the eternal subject of his jokes: he was never done with them, and his favorite's patience was frequently quite tired out. Now, two cruel effects of this teizing on her, as well as on many others, was to put her into a bad humor, and to sour her temper. At those times woe to him that came near her: she made no distinction of persons, and the Sultan himself was not spared.

"Prince," said she to him, in one of these peevish fits, "tho' you are so knowing in many things, perhaps you do not know the news of the day." — — "What is it?" said Mangogul. — — "It is, that every morning you get by heart three pages of Brantome, or of Ouville: people do not determine which of these two profound writers you prefer" — — "They are mistaken, madam," answered Mangogul, "'tis Crebillon, that" — — "O, pray don't excuse yourself from that sort of reading," interrupted the favorite. "The new calumnies that are invented on us, are so insipid, that it is better to revive the old. Truly there are very good things in this same Brantome: if to these little stories you add three or four chapters of Bayle, you alone will in a thrice have as much wit as the marquiss D' —— , and the Chevalier de Mouhi. That would spread a surprising variety on your conversation. When you have equipped the ladies from head to foot, you might then fall on the Pagoda's; and from the Pagoda's you might return on the women. In truth, all that you want to make you quite diverting, is a small collection of impieties."

"You are in the right, madam," answered Mangogul, "and I will take care to lay in a good stock. He who is afraid of being duped in this world and the

next, cannot be too much upon his guard against the power of the Pagoda's, the probity of men, and virtue of women."

"Then, in your opinion, this virtue is a very ambiguous thing?" replied Mirzoza. "More so than you imagine," answered Mangogul.

"Prince," returned Mirzoza, "you have a hundred times talk'd to me of your ministers as the honestest men in Congo. I have so often patiently heard the praises of your Seneschal, of the governors of your provinces, of your secretaries, of your treasurer, in a word, of all your officers, that I am able to repeat them by memory word for word. It is strange, that the object of your tenderness should be the only person excepted from the good opinion, which you have conceived of those who have the honor of being near your person."

"And who told you that it is so?" replied the Sultan. "Be perswaded, madam, that the discourses, true or false, which I make on women, do by no means concern you, unless you think proper to represent the sex in general. __ __"

"I should not advise madam to that," added Selim, who was present at this conversation. "She would gain nothing by it but defects."

"I do not," answered Mirzoza, "relish compliments which are addressed to me at the expence of my sex. When any one takes it into his head to praise me, I could wish that nobody suffered by it. Most of the fine speeches which are offered to us, are like the sumptuous entertainments which your highness receives from your Pacha's: they are always at the expence of the public."

"Let us pass that by," said Mangogul. "But sincerely, are you not convinced that the virtue of the women of Congo is but a mere chimæra? Pray observe, my soul's delight, what the present fashionable education is, what examples mothers set to their daughters, and how the head of a pretty woman is filled with the notion, that to confine herself to domestic affairs,

to manage her family, and keep to her husband, is to lead a dismal life, to be eat up with vapors, and to bury herself alive. And at the same time we men are so forward, and a young unexperienced girl is so raptured with being attack'd. I have said that virtuous women were rare, excessively rare; and far from changing my sentiment, I might add freely, that 'tis surprizing they are not more so. Ask Selim what he thinks of the matter."

"Prince," answered Mirzoza, "Selim has too great obligations to our sex, to tear them in pieces without mercy."

"Madam," said Selim, "his highness, who could not possibly meet with cruel women, ought naturally to think of the sex as he does: and you, who have the good nature to judge of others by yourself, can hardly have any other sentiments than those which you defend. I will own however, that I am apt to believe there are women of sense, to whom the benefits of virtue are known by experience, and whom a serious reflection has convinced of the ill consequences of an irregular life; women happily born, well educated, who have learn'd to feel their duty, who love it, and will never swerve from it."

"And not to lose ourselves in speculative reasoning," added the favorite, "is not Egle, with all her sprightliness and charms, a model of virtue? Prince, you cannot doubt it, and all Banza knows it from your mouth: now, if there be one virtuous woman, there may be a thousand."

"Oh! as to the possibility," said Mangogul, "I dispute it not."

"But if you allow it possible," replied Mirzoza, "who has revealed to you, that they do not actually exist?"

"Nothing but their Toys," answered the Sultan. "And yet I grant that this evidence does not come up to the strength of your argument. May I be transform'd into a mole, if you have not borrowed it from some Bramin. Order the Manimonbanda's chaplain to be called, and he will tell you that you have proved the existence of virtuous women, much as he demonstrates

that of Brama, in Braminology. *A propos*, have you not taken a course in that sublime school, before you entered the Seraglio?"

"No ill-natured jokes," replied Mirzoza. "I do not draw my conclusion from possibility: I ground it on a fact, on an experiment."

"Yes," continued Mangogul, "on a lame fact, on a single experiment; while, to your certain knowledge, I have a multitude of trials for my opinion: but I will not sour your temper by farther contradictions."

"It is a favor," said Mirzoza, "that after two hours teizing, you cease to persecute me."

"If I have committed the fault," answered Mangogul, "I will endeavour to make amends for it. Madam, I give up all my past advantages; and if, in the trials which I shall hereafter make, I light on a single woman really and constantly virtuous." — — "What will you do?" interrupted Mirzoza smartly.

"I will declare to the world, if you require it, that I am charmed with your reasoning on the possibility of virtuous women; I will support the reputation of your logic with all my might; and will give you my castle of Amara, with all the Saxon Porcelaines which adorn it; even without excepting the little Sapajou, or red-faced monkey in Enamel, and the other valuable nick-nacks, which I had out of the cabinet of Madame de Verue."

"Prince," says Mirzoza, "I will be content with the Porcelaines of the castle, and the little monkey."

"A bargain," replies the Sultan, "Selim shall be our judge. I only desire a little respite before I examine Egle's Toy. The court air, and her husband's jealousy, must be allowed time to operate."

Mirzoza granted a month to Mangogul; which was double the time he required: and they parted equally filled with hope.

The city of Banza also would have been full of wagers on either side, if the Sultan's promise had been divulged. But Selim kept the secret, and

Mangogul clandestinely prepared for winning or losing. As he was quitting the favorite's appartment, he heard her call out to him from her closet: "Prince, and the little monkey." "And the little monkey," answered Mangogul, and went out. He was going directly to the private lodge of a senator, whither we will attend him.

CHAP. XXXII. The fifteenth trial of the Ring.

Alphana.



THE SULTAN WAS not ignorant, that the young lords of the court had private lodges; but he was lately informed, that those retreats were likewise used by some senators. He was much surprized at this. “What do they do there?” said he to himself. (For in this volume he will keep up the custom of monology, which he contracted in the first.) “I should think, that a man, whom I have entrusted with the tranquillity, fortune, liberty, and lives of my people, ought not to have a private lodge. But perhaps a senator’s private lodge is quite different from that of a *Petit-Maitre*. Can a magistrate, before whom the interests of the greatest of my subjects are discussed, who holds the fatal urn, out of which he is to draw the widow’s lot, can he, I say, forget the dignity of his state, and the importance of his duty; and while Cochin fatigues his lungs in vain by carrying the cries of the orphan to his ear, can he be studying subjects of gallantry, which are to be ornaments over the door of a place of secret debauchery? That cannot be. —— However, let us see.”

He said, and departed for Alcanto, where the senator Hippomanes has his private lodge. He enters, walks round the appartments, and examines the furniture. Every thing has a gay appearance. The private lodge of Agefilas, the nicest and most voluptuous of his courtiers, is not more elegant. He was on the point of resolving to leave it, without knowing what to think; (for besides all the rich beds, the looking-glass alcoves, the soft sofa’s; the cabinet of exquisite liquors, and every thing else, were silent witnesses of what he desired to know:) when he espied a corpulent figure stretched on a

couch, and sunk in a deep sleep. He turn'd his ring on her, and from her Toy he obtained the following anecdotes.

"Alphana is the daughter of a senator. If her mother's life had been shorter than it was, I should not have been here. The immense wealth of the family was squandered by the old fool: and she left little or nothing to her four children, three boys and a girl, whose Toy I am, alas! to my great misfortune, and to be sure for my sins. How many indignities have I suffered! How many more still remain to be borne! The world said, that the cloister agreed very well with the fortune and figure of my mistress; but I found it did not suit with me: I preferred the military art to the monastic state, and I made my first campaigns under the Emir Azalaph. I perfected myself under the great Nangazaki. But the ingratitude of the service disgusted me, and made me quit the sword for the gown. Thus I am upon the point of belonging to a little scoundrel of a senator, quite bloated with his talents, his wit, his figure, his equipage, and his birth. I am now two hours in waiting for him. To be sure he will come, because his gentleman has apprized me, that when he comes, it is his madness to let people wait a long time."

Alphana's Toy was thus far advanced, when Hippomanes arrived. At the bustle of his train, and the caresses he bestowed on his favorite grey-hound, Alphana awoke. "Oh! are you there, my queen?" says the little president. "'Tis very difficult to come at you. How do you like my little lodge; it is as good as some others, is it not?"

Alphana putting on a bashful, shy, distressed air, "as if we had never seen a private lodge before," says her Toy, "and as if I had no share in her adventures," cried out in a mournful manner. "My lord president, I take an unaccountable step for you. The passion that drags me to you must surely be very violent, since it shuts my eyes to the dangers which I incur. For what would the world say, if there was any suspicion of my being here?"

“You are right,” answered Hippomanes; “your proceeding is liable to misinterpretations. But you may rely on my discretion.”

“But,” replied Alphana, “I rely also on your conduct.”

“Oh! as to that,” says Hippomanes, “I shall be very modest: and how is it possible not to be as devote as an angel in a private lodge? In truth, you have a charming neck — —”

“Ha’ done,” says Alphana, “you break your word already.”

“Not at all,” replies the president: “but you have not answered my question. What do you think of this furniture?” And then turning to his grey-hound, “come hither, Folly, give me thy paw, my child. Folly is a good girl. —— Will madam be pleased to take a turn in the garden? Let us walk on my terrass, it is a charming one. I am overlooked by some of my neighbours, but possibly they will not know you.—”

“My lord president, I am not curious,” says Alphana with an air of dudgeon. “I think we are better here.”

“Just as you please,” answers Hippomanes. “If you are tired, there is a bed. If you have the least inclination, I advise you to try it. Young Asteria, and little Phenice, who are great judges, assure me that it is a good one.” While Hippomanes was talking thus impertinently to Alphana, he pull’d off her gown by the sleeves, unlaced her stays, untied her petticoats, and disengaged her two clumsy feet from two little slippers.

When Alphana was almost naked, then did she perceive that Hippomanes was undressing her.— “What are you doing?” cryed she quite surprized. “President, you don’t consider. I shall be angry in earnest.”

“Ah, my queen,” answered Hippomanes, “to be angry with a man who loves you as I do, would be such an oddity as you are not capable of. May I presume to entreat you to walk to this bed?”

“To this bed,” replied Alphana. “Ah! my lord president, you abuse my tenderness. I to go into a bed! I, into a bed!”

“No, no, my queen,” answered Hippomanes. “That is not the thing, who desires you to go to it. But you must, if you please, suffer yourself to be conducted to it: for you may easily conclude from your size, that I cannot be in the humor of carrying you to it.” — Nevertheless he grasped her about the waist, and making some efforts, “Oh how weighty she is,” says he. “But, my child, if you do not lend a helping hand, we shall never reach it.”

Alphana was sensible that he spoke truth, lent her assistance, compassed getting on her legs, advanced towards that bed, at which she had been so scared, partly on her own feet, and partly on the shoulders of Hippomanes, to whom she pantingly said: “Surely I must have been a great fool to come hither. I confided in your good conduct, and your extravagance is quite unreasonable.”— “Not at all,” answered the president, “not at all. You see that what I do is decent, very decent.”

’Tis probable that they said many other genteel things of this sort; but as the Sultan did not think proper to spend more time in attending their conversation, those things are lost to posterity. What a pity!

CHAP. XXXIII. Sixteenth trial of the Ring.

The *Petits-Maitres.*

TWICE A WEEK the favorite kept a drawing room. The preceding evening she named the women whom she would willingly see, and the Sultan gave the list of the men. The company always came richly dress'd. The conversation was either general, or particular. When the amorous history of the court fail'd of furnishing real diverting adventures, stories were invented, and necessity sometimes compelled them to run into bad tales; which were called a continuation of the Arabian nights entertainments. The men had the privilege of saying all the extravagant things that came into their heads, and the women that of knotting, while they gave ear to them. At these meetings, the Sultan and his favorite put themselves on a level with their subjects: their presence gave no sort of check to whatever could amuse; and people seldom found the time tedious. Mangogul had learned early in his life, that pleasures are not to be found above the foot of the throne; and no man descended from it with better grace, or knew how to put off majesty more *à propos*.

While he was surveying the private lodge of the Senator Hippomanes, Mirzoza waited for him in the rose-colour'd salon, with the youthful Zaide, the chearful Leocris, the lively Serica, Amina and Benzaira, the wives of two Emirs, Orphisa the prude, and Vetula the great Seneschal's lady, temporal mother of all the Bramins. It was not long before he appeared. He enter'd attended by count Hannetillon and the chevalier Fadaes. Alciphenor an old rake, and his disciple young Marmolin followed him; and two minutes after, arrived the Pacha Grifgrif, the Aga Fortimbek, and the Selictar Velvet-Paw. These were the most absolute *Petits-Maitres* of the

court. Mangogul call'd them together designedly. Having heard a thousand stories of their gallant exploits, he resolved to be informed in such a manner as might banish all future doubt. "Well, gentlemen," says he to them, "ye whom nothing escapes, that passes in the empire of gallantry, what news from thence? how far are the Speaking Toys got."

"Sir," replied Alciphenor, "the racket they make encreases daily; and if it continues, we shall soon not be able to hear ourselves. But nothing is so diverting as the indiscretion of Zobeida's Toy. It has given her husband a catalogue of her adventures." "And a prodigious one," says Marmolin: "it mentions five aga's, twenty captains, almost an entire company of janissaries, twelve Bramins: and they say that I am named too, but that is a mere joke." "The best past of the affair is," added Grifgrif, "that the affrighted husband ran away with his fingers in his ears."

"This is quite horrible," said Mirzoza. "Yes, madam," interrupted Fortimbek, "horrible, frightful, execrable." "More than all that, if you please," replied the favorite, "to dishonor a woman upon hearsay."

"Madam, it is literally true, Marmolin has not added one word to the story," says Velvet-Paw. "It is fact," says Grifgrif. "Good," says Hannetillon, "there is an epigram already handed about concerning it, and an epigram is not made for nothing." "But why should Marmolin be safe from the prattle of the Toys? Cynara's Toy has insisted on speaking in its turn, and to blend me with people, who do not stake their all. But how to help that? The right thing is not, to be disturbed at it," says Velvet-Paw. "You are right," answered Hannetillon, and instantly fell to singing:

"Mon bonheur fut si grand, que j'ai peine à le croire."
My fortune was so great, that I can scarce believe it.

"Count," says Mangogul to Hannetillon, "then you have been particularly acquainted with Cynara?"

“Sir,” answered Velvet-Paw, “who doubts, it? He has walk’d with her for more moons than one? they have been song’d; and all this would have lasted to this day, if he had not at length discovered that she was not handsome, and that she had a large mouth.” “Allowed,” replied Hannetillon; “but that imperfection was ballanced by an uncommon agreeableness.”

“How long since this adventure?” ask’d the prude Orphisa. “Madam,” replied Hannetillon, “its epoch is not present to my memory. I must have recourse to the chronological tables of my good fortune. There may be seen the day and minute: but ’tis a large volume, with which my servants amuse themselves in the antichamber.”

“Hold,” says Alciphenor; “I recollect that it was precisely a year after Grifgrif fell out with Madam la Seneschale. She has the memory of an angel, and can tell you exactly.”— “That nothing is more false than your date,” answered the Seneschal’s lady gravely. “’Tis well known that blockheads were never of my taste.” “Yet, madam,” replied Alciphenor, “you will never persuade us, that Marmolin was excessively wise, when he was conducted into your appartment by the back stairs, whenever his highness summoned the Seneschal to council.” “There can be no greater extravagance in my opinion,” added Velvet-Paw, “than to enter into a woman’s chamber by stealth, for nothing at all; for people thought nothing more of his visits than what was really fact, and madam was already in full enjoyment of that reputation of virtue, which she has so well supported since that time.”

“But that is an age ago,” says Fadaes. “It was pretty much about that same time that Zulica made a slip from the Selictar, who was her humble servant, to take possession of Grifgrif, whom she drop’d six months after; she is now got as far as Fortimbek. I am not sorry for my friend’s little stroke of good luck; I see her, I admire her, but entirely without any pretensions.”

“Yet Zulica,” says the favorite, “is very amiable. She has wit, taste, and something, I know not how, engaging in her countenance, which I should prefer to charms.” “I grant that, madam,” answer’d Fadaes: “but she is maigre, has no neck, and her thigh is so skinny, that it raises one’s pity.”

“You are well acquainted with it, to be sure,” added the Sultana. “Oh! madam,” replied Hannetillon, “you may guess that. I have visited Zulica but seldom, and yet I know as much of that affair as Fadaes.” “I can easily believe you,” says the favorite.

“But *à propos*, might one ask Grifgrif,” says the Selictar, “if he has been long in possession of Zirphila. There is what you may call a pretty woman. She has an admirable shape.” “And who doubts it!” added Marmolin.

“How happy is the Selictar,” continued Fadaes. “I give you Fadaes,” interrupted the Selictar, “for the best provided gallant of the court. To my knowledge he has the Visir’s wife, the two prettiest actresses of the opera, and an adorable *Grisette*, whom he keeps in his private lodge.” “And I,” replied Fadaes, “would give up the Visir’s wife, the two actresses and the *Grisette*, for one glance from a certain woman, with whom the Selictar is very well, and who has not the least suspicion that the world knows it;” and then stepping up to Leocris, says, “your blushes are ravishing. — —”

“Hannetillon was a long time wavering,” says Marmolin, “between Melissa and Fatima, two charming women. One day he was for Melissa the fair, the next for Fatima the nut-brown.” “The poor man,” continues Fadaes, “was strangely embarassed: why did he not take them both?” “So he did,” says Alciphenor.

Our *Petits-Maitres* were, as you see, in a right cue not to stop here, when Zobeida, Cynara, Zulica, Melissa, Fatima and Zirphila sent in their names. This ill-timed circumstance disconcerted them for a moment; but they soon recover’d from their ruffle, and fell on other women, whom their detraction had hitherto spared, only because they had not time to tear them to pieces.

Mirzoza, quite out of patience at their discourses, said: “Gentlemen, considering the merit and probity in particular, which must needs be allowed ye, it cannot be doubted but that you have enjoyed all the good fortunes of which you boast. I must own nevertheless, that I would be very glad to hear the Toys of these ladies on this head; and that I would most heartily thank Brama, if he would deign to render justice to truth by their mouths.”

“That is to say,” replies Hannetillon, “that madam would desire to hear the same things twice over: well, to oblige her, we’ll repeat them.”

But Mangogul set about applying his ring in order of seniority: he began by Madame la Seneschale, whose Toy cough’d three times, and with a trembling and broken voice said: “To the great Seneschal I am indebted for the first fruits of my pleasures: but I had not been his property above six months, when a young Bramin gave my mistress to understand, that a woman can do no injury to her husband, while she thinks on him. I relished the moral, and thenceforward thought I might with a safe conscience admit a senator, then a privy counsellor, then a pontif, then one or two masters of Requests, then a musician” — — “And Marmolin?” says Fadaes. — — “Marmolin,” replies the Toy, “I know him not, unless it be that young coxcomb, whom my lady ordered to be kick’d out of her house, for some insolence, the particulars of which I have forgot. — —”

Cynara’s Toy took up the discourse, and said: “Do you interrogate me concerning Alciphenor, Fadaes, and Grifgrif? I have indeed been pretty well served; but this is the first time that I ever heard these folks named. However, I shall get some account of them from Amalek the Emir, Telenor the Financier, or the Visir Abdiram, who know the whole world, and are my good friends.”

“Cynara’s Toy is discreet,” says Hannetillon: “it mentions not Zarafis, Ahiram, the old Trebister, and the young Mahmoud, who is not made to be

forgotten; nor does it accuse the least Bramin, tho' it has been running thro' the monasteries these twelve years."

"I have received some visits in my life," says Melissa's Toy, "but not one from Grifgrif or Fortimbek, and much less still from Hannetillon."

"My little heart of a Toy," replied Grifgrif, "you are mistaken. You may disclaim Fortimbek and me, but as to Hannetillon, he is better with you than you allow. He has told me a word or two on the subject, and he is a spark of the greatest veracity in Congo, a better man than any of those whom you have known, and is still capable of establishing the reputation of a Toy."

"The reputation of an impostor can no more escape him than his friend Fadaes," says Fatima's Toy with a sob. "What have I done to these monsters to dishonour me? The son of the Abyssinian Emperor came to Erguebzed's court: I pleased him; he pursued me; but he would have fail'd of success, and I should have continued faithful to my husband whom I loved; had not the traitor Velvet-Paw and his base accomplice Fadaes corrupted my women, and introduced the young prince into my bath."

The Toys of Zirphila and Zulica, who had the same cause to defend, spoke both at the same time, but with such rapidity, that it was extremely difficult to render each of them its due.— "Favors!" cried one — — "To Velvet-Paw!" says the other — — "Something may be said for Zinzim" — — "Cerbelon" — — "Bemengel" — — "Agarias" — — "the French slave Riqueli" — — "the young Ethiopian Thezaca" — — "But as for the insipid Velvet-Paw" — — "the insolent Fadaes" — — "I swear by Brama" — — "I call the great Pagoda and the Genius Cucufa to witness" — — "I know them not" — — "I never had the least dealings with them. — —"

Zirphila and Zulica would have run on, God knows how far, if Mangogul had not turn'd off his ring: but as this magic ring ceased acting on them, their Toys closed their lips, and a profound silence succeeded the noise they made. Then the Sultan rose up, and darting furious looks on our young

blockheads, said: “You have taken the liberty to defame women whom you never had the honour of coming near, and who hardly know your names. Who has made ye insolent enough to lie in my presence? Tremble, wretches.” At these words he grasped his cymeter: but the screams of the affrighted ladies stop’d his hand. “I was going,” says Mangogul, “to give ye the death which you have merited: but the ladies, whom you have injured, have a right to determine your fate: it shall depend on them, either to crush ye, or to let ye live. Speak, ladies, what are your commands?”

“That they live,” says Mirzoza, “and hold their tongues, if possible.”

“Live,” replies the Sultan, “these ladies permit it: but if ever you forget on what condition, I swear by my father’s soul — —”

Mangogul did not complete his oath; being interrupted by one of the gentlemen of his bed-chamber, who inform’d him that the comedians were ready. This prince had imposed it on himself as a law never to retard the public diversions. “Let them begin,” says he, and immediately gave his hand to the favorite, whom he accompanied to her box.

CHAP. XXXIV. Seventeenth trial of the Ring.

The Comedy.



HAD THE TASTE of good declamation been known in Congo, there were some comedians who might well be spared. Of thirty persons which composed the band, there was but one great actor, and two tolerable actresses. The genius of authors was obliged to comply with the mediocrity of the greatest number; and there was no room to hope, that a play would be performed with any tolerable success, without taking care to model the characters on the defects of the comedians. This is what was meant in my time by the custom of the stage. Formerly the actors were made for the pieces; but now the pieces were made for the actors. If you offer'd a new play, to be sure it underwent an examination, to know whether the subject was engaging, the intrigue well connected, the characters supported, and the diction pure and flowing: but if there were no parts for Roscius and Amiana, it was refused.

The Kislar Agasi, superintendant of the Sultan's pleasures, had packed a company of players together, as he could find them; and this was the first representation of a new tragedy at the Seraglio. It was composed by a modern author, who had gain'd such reputation, that tho' his piece had been but a string of impertinences, it would assuredly have met with a favorable reception. But he did not debase his character. His work was well written, his scenes conducted with art, his incidents managed with dexterity, the interest went on increasing, and the passions in being developed. The acts, naturally link'd together, and full, constantly held the audience in suspence with regard to the sequel, and satisfied with what was past: and they were got to the fourth act of this master-piece, to a very moving scene, which was

a preparation to another still more interesting; when Mangogul, in order to save himself from the ridicule of listening to the tender parts, pull'd out his glass, and acting the inattentive, surveyed the several boxes. In the front box he observed a woman in great emotion, but of an ill-timed sort, as having no relation to the piece. His ring was instantly levelled at her, and in the midst of most pathetic commendations, a Toy, panting for breath, was heard addressing the player in these terms:

"Ah! —— Ah! —— Pray stop, Orgogli; —— you melt me excessively —— Ah! —— Ah! —— There's no bearing it. — —"

The audience listened, and look'd towards the place whence the voice proceeded: and the word ran thro' the pit, that it was a Toy that made the speech. "Which Toy," says one, "and what has it said?" And without waiting for an answer, there was a general clap and cry: *Encore, encore*. The author, who was behind the scenes, fearing that this unlucky accident might interrupt the representation of his piece, foamed with rage, and gave the whole race of Toys to Belzebub. The noise was great and lasting; and had it not been for the respect due to the Sultan, the play would have stop'd short at this incident: but Mangogul made a sign for silence; the actors resumed their parts, and went thro' the play.

The Sultan, curious to know the consequences of so public a declaration, caused the Toy that made it, to be observed. Word was soon brought him, that the player was to go from the stage to Eriphila's house. He prevented him, thanks to the power of his ring, and was in this lady's appartment when Orgogli sent in his name.

Eriphila was under arms, that is, in an amorous *deshabillé*, and wantonly stretch'd on a couch. The comedian entered with a solemn, haughty, insipid air of a conqueror. With the left hand he waved a plain hat with a white feather in it, and caressed his nostrils and upper lip with the tops of the fingers of his right hand, a very theatrical gesture, which was admired by

Connoisseurs. His bow was cavalier, and his compliment familiar. “Oh! my queen,” cried he, in an affected tone, stooping to Eriphila, “what a trim you are in! But do you know that in that careless garb you are adorable. — —”

The tone of this scoundrel shock’d Mangogul. The prince was young, and might possibly be ignorant of certain customs — — “Then you like me, my dear,” answered Eriphila. “To ravishment, I tell you.”— “That gives me great joy. I wish you would repeat that passage which raised such emotions in me a while ago. That passage —— there —— yes —— it is that same —— How seducing a rogue he is? —— But go on; that moves me strangely.”

In pronouncing these words, Eriphila darted such glances on her hero, as bespoke every thing, and stretch’d out her hand to him, which the impertinent Orgogli kissed by way of acquittance. Prouder of his talent than of his conquest, he declaimed with emphasis, and the lady was so enraptur’d, that one minute she conjur’d him to continue, and the next to stop. Mangogul judging by her looks, that her Toy would willingly play its part in this rehearsal, chose rather to guess at the rest of the scene, than to be present at it. He disappear’d, and return’d to the favorite, who expected him.

On the recital which the Sultan made her of this adventure, — — “Prince, what do you say?” cried she. “Then the women are fallen into the lowest degree of meanness! A comedian, the slave of the public! A buffoon! Well, if those folks had nothing against them but their state of life: but most of them have neither morals nor sentiments; and even among them, that Orgogli is but a machine. He has never thought, and if he had not learn’d some parts in plays, perhaps he would never have spoken. — —”

“Delight of my heart,” replied Mangogul, “you run into lamentations without considering the matter sufficiently. Then have you forgot Haria’s pack? By Jove, a comedian, I think, is as good as a pug-dog.”

“You say right, prince,” resumed the favorite. “I am a fool for interesting myself for creatures that do not deserve it. Let Palabria idolize her boobies! Let Salica have her vapors treated by Farfadi in her own way! Let Haria live and dye among her dogs! Let Eriphila abandon herself to all the buffoons of Congo! What is all this to me? I only risque a castle thereby. Nay, I perceive that I must have no thoughts of it, and I have taken my resolution accordingly.”

“Farewell then the little monkey,” says Mangogul.

“Farewell the little monkey,” replies Mirzoza; “and the good opinion which I had conceived of my sex; I believe I shall never resume it. Prince, you will allow me not to suffer a women to enter these doors this fortnight at least.”

“But you must have some company,” added the Sultan.

“I shall enjoy your company, or please myself in expecting it,” replied the favourite: “and if any moments remain on my hands, I shall dispose of them in favor of Ricaric and Selim, who are attached to me, and whose conversation I love. When I happen to be tired of the erudition of my lecturer, your courtier will divert me with the adventures of his youth.”

CHAP. XXXV. Conversation on literature.



THE FAVORITE LOVED men of genius, without pretending to be a genius herself. On her toilette, among jewels and other female ornaments, the novels and pamphlets of the time were to be met with, and she talk'd of them wonderfully well. From a Cavagnol and Biribi she passed with ease and propriety to the course of an academician, or other learned man: and every body confessed, that the natural delicacy of her understanding made her discover beauties or defects in those several works, which had sometimes escaped their lucubrations. Mirzoza astonished them by her penetration, embarrassed them by her questions; but never abused the advantages which her wit and beauty gave her: and people were not sorry for being detected in the wrong by her. Towards the close of an evening, which she had passed with Mangogul, Selim came, and she sent for Ricaric. The African author has reserved Selim's character for another place: but he informs us here, that Ricaric was a member of the academy of Congo; that his erudition had not hindered him from being a man of wit; that he had acquired a profound knowledge of former ages; that he had a scrupulous attachment to the ancient rules which he cited eternally; that he was a machine by principles; and that it was impossible to be a more zealous partisan of the first writers of Congo; but more especially of one Miroufla, who, about 3040 years before, had composed a sublime poem in the Caffrian language, on the conquest of a great forest, out of which the Caffres expelled the monkeys, who were in possession of it from time immemorial. Ricaric had translated it into Congese, and published a very beautiful edition of it, illustrated with notes, Scholia, various readings, and all the embellishments of a Benedictine edition. Besides, they had of him

two bad tragedies writ according to all the rules, a panegyric on crocodiles, and some opera's.

"I bring you, madam," says Ricaric with a low bow, "a novel, which is ascribed to the marchioness Tamazi; but in which we unluckily discover the hand of Mulhazen, the answer of our president Lambadago to the discourse of the poet Tuxigraphus, which we received yesterday; and the Tamerlan of this last."

"This is admirable!" says Mangogul. "The press goes on incessantly; and if the husbands of Congo performed their duty as well as the writers, in less than ten years I might be enabled to set sixteen hundred thousand men on foot, and promise myself the conquest of Monoémugi. We will read the novel at leisure. Now let us see the harangue, especially that part which relates to me."

Ricaric turn'd it over, and light on this passage. "The ancestors of our august emperor have rendered themselves illustrious without doubt. But Mangogul, greater than they, has prepared quite different subjects of admiration for future ages. What do I say of admiration? Let us speak more accurately; of incredulity. If our ancestors had cause to assert, that posterity would esteem as fables the wonders of Kanaglou's reign; how much more reason have we to think, that our descendants will refuse credit to the prodigies of wisdom and valor, of which we are witnesses?"

"My poor Mr. Lambadago," says the Sultan, "you are but retailer of phrases. What I have reason to believe, is that your successors will one day eclipse my glory by that of my son, as you make my father's vanish before mine; and so on, as long as there will be one academician left. What think you, Mr. Ricaric?"

"Prince, all that I can say," answered Ricaric, "is, that the passage which I have read to your highness, was extremely relished by the public."

“So much the worse,” replied Mangogul. “Then the true taste of eloquence is lost in Congo? It was not thus that the sublime Homilogo praised the great Aben.”

“Prince,” said Ricaric, “true eloquence is nothing but the art of speaking in a noble, and at the same time agreeable and perswasive manner.”

“Add, and sensible,” continued the Sultan, “and upon this principle judge your friend Lambadago. With all the respect that I have for modern eloquence, he is but a false declaimer.”

“But, prince,” answered Ricaric, “without passing the bounds of that, which I owe your highness, will you permit me — —”

“What I give you full permission to do,” replied Mangogul smartly, “is to respect good sense beyond my highness, and to tell me sincerely, if an eloquent man can ever dispense himself from shewing some signs of it.”

“No, prince,” answered Ricaric, and he was going to string up a long bead-roll of authorities, and cite all the rhetoricians of Afric, the two Arabia’s, and China, in order to prove the most incontestable thing in the world, when he was interrupted by Selim.

“All your authors,” said the courtier, “will never prove that Lambadago is not a very awkward and indecent haranguer. Pray, Mr. Ricaric, excuse these expressions. I honour you in a singular manner; but indeed, laying aside the prejudice of confraternity, can you avoid allowing with us, that, as the Sultan now reigning is just, amiable, beneficent, and a great warrior, he does not stand in need of the embroidery of your rhetoricians, to be as great as his ancestors; and that a son, who is exalted by depressing his father and grandfather, would be very ridiculously vain, if he were not sensible, that in embellishing him with one hand, he is disfigured by the other. In order to prove that Mangogul is as well-made a man as any of his predecessors, do you think it necessary to knock off the heads of the statues of Erguebzed and Kanaglou?”

“Mr. Ricaric,” says Mirzoza, “Selim is in the right. Let every one enjoy what belongs to him, and let us not make the public suspect, that our panegyrics are a sort of robberies committed on the memory of our fathers: declare this from me in the next full meeting of the academy.”

“People are too long in possession of this custom,” replied Selim, “to expect any benefit from this advice.”

“I believe, Sir, that you are mistaken,” said Ricaric to Selim. “The academy is still the sanctuary of good taste; and its best times do not afford us either philosophers or poets, whom we cannot match at this day. Our stage has passed, and may still pass for the first stage of Africa. Oh! what a work is the Tamerlane of Tuxigraphus! ’Tis the pathetic of Eurisope, and the loftiness of Azopha. ’Tis antiquity quite pure.”

“I saw,” said the favorite, “the first representation of Tamerlane; and join with you in thinking the work well conducted, the dialogue elegant, and the propriety of characters well observed.”

“What difference, madam,” interrupted Ricaric, “between such an author as Tuxigraphus, fatted with the perusal of the ancients, and most part of our moderns.”

“Yet these moderns,” said Selim, “whom you demolish here at your ease, are not so contemptible as you pretend. What, don’t you find genius, invention, fire, details, characters, and fine strokes of wit in them? And of what importance are rules to me, provided a writer pleases me? Certainly it is neither the observations of the wise Almudir and the learned Abaldok, nor the art of poetry of the deep-read Facardin, which I have never perused, that makes me admire the pieces of Aboulcazem, Muhardar, Albaboukre, and many other Sarracens! Is there any other rule but the imitation of nature; and have we not as good eyes as those who studied her?”

“Nature,” answered Ricaric, “presents us with different faces every instant. They are all true, but all are not equally beautiful. It is in these

works, on which you seem not to set any great value, that we should learn to choose. They are collections of their own experiments, and also of those which had been made before them. Whatever strength of understanding a person may have, things must be observed successively; and one man cannot hope to see in the short course of his life, all that had been discovered to his time. Otherwise we may assert, that any one science might owe its birth, progress, and utmost perfection to one head: which is contrary to experience."

"Mr. Ricaric," replied Selim, "the only consequence that I can draw from your argument is, that as the moderns are in possession of treasures amassed up to their times, they must be richer than the ancients; or, if this comparison displeases you, that as they are raised on the shoulders of those giants, they ought to see farther than them. And in fact, what is their natural philosophy, their astronomy, their navigation, their mechanics, their calculations, in comparison of ours? And why may not our eloquence and poesy have the superiority likewise?"

"Selim," said the Sultana, "Ricaric will, at some proper time, give you the reasons of this difference. He will tell you why our tragedy is inferior to that of the ancients: for my part, I willingly undertake to shew you, that it is so. I will not accuse you," continued she, "of not having read the ancients. Your mind is too well adorned, to be ignorant of their stage. Now, abstracting from certain notions relative to their customs, manners and religion, which shock you purely because circumstances are changed; you will allow that their subjects are noble, well-chosen, and interesting; that the action naturally develops itself; that their dialogue is simple, and very near nature; that the unravelling of their plot is not strained; that the interest is not divided, nor the action overloaded with episodes. Transport yourself in idea to the isle of Alindala; examine every thing that passes there; attend to all that is said, from the moment that young Ibrahim and the crafty Forfanti

landed thereon: approach the cave of the wretched Polipsile; lose not a word of her complaints; and then tell me, if any one circumstance draws you out of the illusion. Name me a modern piece that can bear the same examination, and pretend to the same degree of perfection; and I grant you the victory."

"By Brama," cried the Sultan, yawning, "madam has made an academical dissertation."

"I do not understand the rules," continued the favorite; "and much less the learned words, in which they are expressed: but I know that nothing but the *True* can please and touch. I also know that the perfection of a dramatic piece consists in the exact imitation of an action, so that the spectator, continually deceived, imagines he is present at the very action. Now, pray, is there any thing like this in the tragedies which you extol to us?

"Do you admire the manner in which they are conducted? It is generally so complicated, that it must be a miracle, that so many things should happen in so little time. The ruin or preservation of an empire, the marriage of a princess, the loss of a prince; all this is done with the turn of a hand. Is the subject a conspiracy? It is sketch'd out in the first act; it is connected and strengthened in the second; all the measures are taken, the obstacles removed, the conspirators are quite ready for action in the third; immediately there shall be a revolt, an engagement, perhaps a pitch'd battle; and you will call this conduct, interest, fire, verisimilitude: I can never excuse it, in you especially, who are not ignorant, what it sometimes costs to put an end to a pitiful intrigue; and how much time the smallest political affair absorbs in taking measures, in previous meetings, and in deliberations."

"I grant, madam," answered Selim, "that our pieces are a little overcharged; but it is a necessary evil: without the assistance of episodes, the audience would be chill'd."

“That is to say, that in order to give spirit to the representation of a fact, it must be made such as it neither is, nor ought to be. This is ridiculous in the highest degree; unless it be still more absurd to make the violins play up rigadoons and country-dances, while the audience are in deep concern for a prince, who is on the point of losing his mistress, his throne and his life.”

“Madam, you are are in the right,” said Mangogul: “the music should be mournful on those occasions; and I go to order you some of that kind.” Mangogul rose up, went out, and the conversation was continued between Selim, Ricaric, and the favorite.

“At least, madam,” replied Selim, “you will not deny, that if the episodes draw us out of the illusion, the dialogue leads us back into it. I see none who understand it like our tragic writers.”

“Then, nobody understands it,” resumed Mirzoza. “The emphasis, wit and affected decorations, which predominate in it, are a thousand leagues distant from nature. In vain does the author endeavour to conceal himself, my eyes are penetrating and I discover him incessantly behind the persons of the drama. Cinna, Sertorius, Maximus, and Æmilius, are Corneille’s speaking trumpets in almost every page. This is not the way that people converse in our ancient Sarracen authors. Ricaric will, if you desire it, translate you some scenes out of them; and then you will hear pure nature speaking by their mouths. I could willingly say to the moderns: ‘Gentlemen, instead of dealing out wit to your personages on every occasion, put them into such circumstances as must inspire them with some.’”

“After what madam has declared on the management and the dialogue of our drama’s; there is no great probability,” says Selim; “that she will shew indulgence to the plots.”

“No certainly,” replied the favorite: “there are a hundred bad for one good. This is not brought on properly, that is quite miraculous. Is an author encumbered with a personage, which he has drag’d from scene to scene

thro' five acts, he dispatches him with a stab of a ponyard: every body falls to crying, and I burst into laughter. Besides, did mortals ever speak as we declaim? Do kings and princes walk otherwise than a well-bred man? Have they ever gesticulated like persons possessed or raging mad? Do princesses speak in a shrill squeaking tone? It is generally supposed that we have carried tragedy to a high degree of perfection; and I on the contrary think it is next to demonstration, that of all the kinds of literary works, to which the Africans have applied themselves in these latter ages, this is the most imperfect."

The favorite was advanced thus far in her sally against our theatrical pieces, when Mangogul returned. "Madam," said he, "you will oblige me in continuing. You see I have a secret to abridge a poetical subject, when I find it tedious."

"I suppose," continued the favorite, "a person just arrived from Angola, who had never heard a play mentioned, but otherwise does not want good sense and breeding, has some acquaintance with the courts of princes, the intrigues of courtiers, the jealousies of ministers, and the double dealings of women; to whom I say in confidence 'My friend, there are terrible commotions actually in the Seraglio. The prince, dissatisfied with his son, in whom he suspects a passion for the Manimonbanda, is a man capable of taking the most cruel vengeance of them both. This adventure will, in all probability, be attended with dismal consequences. If you choose it, I will make you an eye-witness of all that passes.' He accepts my offer, and I carry him into a box screen'd by a blind, from whence he sees the stage, which he takes for the Sultan's palace, Do you believe, notwithstanding the serious air I put on, that this person's illusion can last a moment? Will you not rather agree with me, that the stiff-affected carriage of the actors, the oddity of their dress, the extravagance of their gestures, the emphasis of a singular language in rhyme and cadence, and a thousand other shocking

dissonances, must make him laugh in my face before the first scene is over, and tell me either that I make game of him, or that the prince and all his court are mad."

"I own," said Selim, "that this supposition strikes me: but may I not observe to you, that people go to the play-house, fully perswaded that they are to see the imitation of an event, and not the event itself."

"And ought that perswasion," replied Mirzoza, "to hinder the players from representing the event in the most natural manner?"

"All this means, madam," interrupted Mangogul, "that you put yourself at the head of the censors."

"And if your opinion be received," continued Selim, "the empire is threatened with the decay of good taste; barbarism will revive, and we are in danger of relapsing into the ignorance of the ages of Mamurrha and Orondado."

"My lord, pray have no such apprehensions. I hate peevish humors, and will not add to their number. Besides, I have the glory of his highness too much at heart, to think of ever attempting to tarnish the splendor of his reign. But if credit were given to us, is it not true, Mr. Ricaric, that literature would shine with greater lustre?"

"How," said Mangogul, "have you not a memorial on this subject to present to my Seneschal?"

"No, sir," answered Ricaric; "but after having thanked your highness in behalf of the Literati, for the new inspector, which you have given them; I would most humbly remonstrate to your Seneschal, that the choice of learned men appointed to revise manuscripts is an affair of great nicety: that this trust is committed to persons, who seem to me very much inferior to their employ; and from thence results a crowd of evil effects, such as curtailing good works, cramping the best genius's, who not being at liberty to write in their own way, either write not at all, or send their productions

with considerable sums to foreigners; giving a bad opinion of those topicks which are prohibited to be discussed, and a thousand other inconveniencies, which it would be too tedious to mention to your highness. I would advise him to retrench the pensions of certain literary leaches, who are always craving unmercifully; I mean glossators, antiquaries, commentators, and others of this stamp, who would be very useful, if they did their business well; but who are got into the wretched custom of passing over obscure places, and of dwelling upon passages that admit of no difficulty. I would have him be very attentive to suppress almost all posthumous works; and not to suffer the memory of a great author to be tarnished by the covetousness of a bookseller, who collects and publishes, a long time after a man's death, such works as he had condemned to oblivion in his lifetime." "And I," continued the favorite, "would point out to him a small number of men of distinguished merit, such as Mr. Ricaric, on whom he may bestow your benefactions. Is it not somewhat surprising, that the poor man has no provision made for him, while the precious chiromancer of the Manimonbanda receives a thousand sequins a year from your treasury."

"Well, madam,", answered Mangogul, "I assign Mr. Ricaric the like sum on my coffers, in consideration of the wonderful things you tell me of him."

"Mr. Ricaric," said the favorite, "I also must do something for you: in your favor I sacrifice the small resentment of my self-love; and in consideration of the recompence which Mangogul has granted to your merit, I forget the injury he has done me."

"Pray, madam, may I ask you what that injury is?" replied Mangogul.

"You may, Sir, and I will tell you. You yourself make us embark in a conversation on the *Belles-Lettres*: you begin by a piece of modern eloquence, which is not extraordinary; and when, to oblige you, we prepare to pursue the disagreeable argument which you have started, you are seized with uneasiness and yawning, you teize yourself in your seat, you change

your posture a hundred times, without finding one easy one: tired in fine of keeping your countenance, tho' a sad one, you come to a sudden resolution, you get up and disappear: and then, whither do you go? Perhaps to give ear to a Toy!"

"I own the fact, madam, but I see nothing in it that should give offence. If a man happens to be disgusted at fine things, and amuse himself with hearing bad, so much the worse for him. This unjust preference takes nothing from the merit of what he has quitted: he only declares himself a bad judge. To this I could add, madam, that while you were labouring hard at Selim's conversion, I was working with no better success to procure you a castle. In fine, if I must be culpable, since you have pronounc'd me so, I can assure you that you have had your revenge at the very time."

"Pray, how that?" said the favorite. "Thus it is," answered the Sultan. "In order to refresh myself from the fatigue of the academical sitting which I had undergone, I went to examine some Toys." — — "Well, prince" — — "Well, I never heard such insipid creatures as the two which I light upon." — — "This gives me the highest joy," replied the favorite. —— They both fell to talking an unintelligible language. I have perfectly well retained every thing they said; but let me die, if I understand a word of it.

CHAP. XXXVI. Eighteenth and nineteenth trials of the Ring.

The flatted Spheroïd, and Girgiro the entangled: catch who can.



"THAT IS SINGULAR," continued the favorite. "Till this moment, I always imagined, that the chief fault found with Toys, was their speaking too plainly." "Oh! madam," replied Mangogul, "these two are not of that tribe; understand them who can.

"You know that little crumpling of woman, whose head is sunk into her shoulders, whose arms are hardly to be seen, and whose legs are so short, and her belly so lank, that one might mistake her for a hedge-hog, for a clumsy ill-develop'd embryo, who bears the the nick-name of the *flatted Spheroïd*; who has filled her head with a notion that Brama called her to the study of geometry, because he has given her the figure of a bowl; and who consequently might have chosen the profession of artillery: for considering her make, she must have issued out of nature's bosom, as a bullet out of the mouth of a cannon.

"Willing to receive informations from her Toy, I examined it. But the vorticose creature spoke in terms of such sublime geometry, that I did not understand one word, nor perhaps did it understand its own language. It was nothing but right lines, concave surfaces, given quantities, longitude, latitude, profundity, solids, living forces, dead forces, cone, cylinder, conic sections, curves, elastic curves, curve re-entring into itself, with its point conjugated — —"

"I pray your highness to excuse me from the rest," cried the favorite mournfully. "You have a cruel memory, enough to put one to death. It has raised a swimming in my head, which I dare say I shall not get rid of these eight days. But was the other so diverting?"

“You shall be the judge,” replied Mangogul. “By Brama’s great toe, I have performed a prodigy. I have retain’d its motly gibberish word for word, tho’ it be so thoroughly void of sense and perspicuity, that if you give me a subtile and critical explanation of it, madam, you will make me an acceptable present.”

“How have you said, prince?” cried Mirzoza. “Let me die, if you have not stolen that phrase from somebody.”

“I can’t tell how it has happened,” replied Mangogul: “for these two Toys are the only persons to whom I have given audience this day. The last, on whom I turned my ring, after a moment’s silence, said, as if addressing an audience,

“‘Gentlemen,

“‘I shall take the liberty to avoid seeking, to the contempt of my own reason, a model of thinking and expressing myself. But yet if I advance any thing new, it shall not be affectation, but the subject shall have furnished me with it: if I repeat what has been already said, it will be my own thought, as well as it has been that of others. Let not irony come to turn this preamble into ridicule, and accuse me of either not having read, or of having read to no purpose. A Toy like me is not made for reading, or profiting by its reading, or foreseeing an objection, or answering it.

“‘I shall not debar myself of reflections and ornaments proportioned to my subject; the rather because in this regard it is extremely modest, and will not admit of any great quantity or brilliancy. But I will avoid sinking into those little minute details, which fall to the share of the barren orator. It would be cause of great grief to me to be suspected of this defect.

“‘After having informed ye, gentlemen, of what you are to expect from my discoveries and elocution, some few strokes of the pencil will be sufficient, to sketch you out my character.

“‘You know, gentlemen, as well as I, that there are two sorts of Toys: proud Toys and modest Toys. The former are haughty, and always expect the place of honour. The latter affect to be courteous, and present themselves with an air of submission. These two intentions appear manifestly in the execution of their projects, and determine both sorts to act according to the genius that guides them.

“‘I imagined, thro’ attachment to the prejudices of my first education, that I should open to myself a safer, easier, and more agreeable career, if I preferr’d the part of humility to that of pride; and I offered myself with infantile bashfulness and winning supplications to all, whom I had the good fortune to meet.

“‘But oh! how unhappy are the times. After ten times more *buts* and *ifs* and *ands* than were sufficient to make the most unemployed Toy lose all patience, my services were accepted. Alas! this job was of short duration. My first possessor giving himself up to the flattering glory of a new conquest, discarded me, and I found myself all at once out of employment.

“‘My treasure was gone, and I did not flatter myself that fortune would make me amends for it. In effect the vacant place was occupied, but not filled by a Sexagenarian, to whom good will was less wanting than the means.

“‘He laboured with all his might to make me forget my past state. He had for me all that behavior, which is esteemed polite and engaging in the career that I pursued: but his efforts did not conquer my regret.

“‘If industry, which is said never to fall short, made him find in the treasures of the natural faculty some abatement to my grief; this compensation to me appeared insufficient, in spite of my imagination, which was daily on the rack to find new resemblances, and even to suppose imaginary ones, but to no purpose.

“‘Such is the advantage of primacy, that it seizes the idea, and forms a barrier against every thing that would afterwards present itself under other forms: and such is, shall I say it, to our shame, the ungrateful nature of Toys, that they never take the good-will for the deed.

“‘This remark seems to me so natural, that, without being indebted to any body for it, I cannot think that I am the only one who has made it. But if any person before me has been struck with it; at least, gentlemen I am the first who undertake, by demonstrating it, to set its full value in a proper light.

“‘I am far from laying the least blame to the charge of those who have raised their voice hitherto, for having let this stroke escape them; my self-love being abundantly satisfied, to be able, after so great a number of orators, to present my observation as something new.—’”

“Ah! prince,” cried Mirzoza smartly, “I fancy I hear the chiromancer of the Manimonbanda. Apply to him, and you will have the subtile and critical explanation, of which you would in vain expect the agreeable present from any other person.”

The African author says, that Mangogul smiled, and continued. “But I do not intend,” says he, “to relate the rest of his discourse. If this beginning has not given as much amusement as the first pages of *La Fée Taupe*, the sequel would be more tiresome than the last pages of the *Fée Moustache*.”

CHAP. XXXVII. Mirzoza's dream.



BY THE TIME that Mangogul had finished the academical discourse of Girgiro the entangled, night came on, and the company went to bed.

That night the favorite might well flatter herself with sleeping soundly: but the evening's conversation ran in her head while asleep: and its ideas mixing with others, produced an odd dream, which she did not fail relating to the Sultan, in these words.

"I was in my first sleep, when I imagined that I was transported into an immense gallery quite full of books. I shall say nothing of their contents: they were to me at that time, what they are to many others, who are not asleep. I did not so much as look at one title-page: a more striking sight attracted my whole attention.

"From space to space between the presses, that contain'd the books, there were pedestals, on which were placed most beautiful busto's of marble and Bronze. The injury of time had spared them; and some little defects excepted, they were entire and perfect. That nobleness and elegance which characterized the works of the ancients, were stamped on them. Most of them had long beards, large foreheads like yours, and engaging countenances.

"I was anxious to learn their names, and know their merit, when a woman came thro' the casement of a window, and accosted me. Her shape was genteel, her gait majestic, and her carriage noble, sweetness and loftiness were blended in her looks, and her voice had some inexpressible charm that delighted. A helmet, a coat of mail, and a flowing petticoat, made up all her attire. 'I know your anxiety,' said she to me, 'and am going to satisfy your curiosity: the men whose busto's have struck you, were my favorites. They consecrated their studies to the perfection of the elegant

arts, whereof the invention is due to me. They lived in the most polite countries of the world, and their writings, which were the delight of their contemporaries, are the admiration of the present age. Draw near, and you will see carved on the several pedestals in *Basso relievo*, some remarkable subjects, which will at least point out to you the character of their writings.'

"The first busto which I examined, was that of a majestic old man, who seem'd to have been blind. In all probability he had sung of battles: for such were the subjects on the sides of his pedestal. The front was all taken up with a single figure, which was that of a young hero. His hand grasped the handle of his cymeter, and a woman's arm appear'd holding him back by the hair of the head, who seem'd to moderate his wrath.

"Opposite to this bust was placed that of a young man: he was the picture of modesty. His looks were turned on the old man with uncommon attention. He had also sung of wars and combats: but these were not the only subjects that employed him: for of the *Basso relievo's* which surrounded him, the principal one represented on one side husbandmen stooping on their ploughs, and tilling the ground; on the other, shepheards stretched on the grass, and played on their flutes amidst their herds and dogs.

"The busto placed below the old man on the same side, had a wild look. His eye seem'd to pursue some object that was flying from him: and under him were represented a lyre carelessly thrown aside, scattered laurels, broken chariots, and fiery horses running away in a vast plain.

"Fronting this I saw a busto, which made so deep an impression on me, that I fancy I see him still. He had a fine air, an aquiline pointed nose, a steady look, and an arch smile. The *Basso relievo's*, which adorned his pedestal, were so full of matter, that it would be an endless task to undertake the description of them.

“After examining some others, I began to ask some questions of my guide.

“‘Who is that,’ said I, ‘who bears truth on his lips, and probity on his countenance.’ ‘He was,’ replied she, ‘the friend and victim to both. He spent his life in improving his fellow citizens in knowledge and virtue, and these ingrateful citizens put him to death.’

“‘And this busto placed below him?’ ‘Which? That which appears supported by the graces carved on the sides of his pedestal?’ ‘The same.’— ‘He is the disciple and inheriter of the sense and principles of the unfortunate virtuous man above mentioned.’

“‘And this lusty jolly fellow, crowned, with vine branches and myrtle, who is he?’— ‘A lovely philosopher, who made it his sole business to sing and taste pleasure. He died in the arms of voluptuousness.’

“‘And this other blind man?’— ‘He is,’ said she —— But I waited not for her answer. I imagined I was got among my acquaintance, and hurried to a busto placed opposite to him. This was posed on a trophy of different attributes of arts and sciences: Cupids sported among them on one of the sides of the pedestal: on another was a group of the Genii of politics, history, and philosophy. On the third, on one hand appear’d two armies drawn up in battle-array; astonishment and horror dwelt on every countenance, blended with marks of admiration and pity. These passions were probably excited by an object, which was there express’d. It was a young man expiring, and by his side an aged warrior, who pointed his sword to his own breast. These figures were exquisitely beautiful, and nothing could be more artfully touch’d than the despair of the one, and the mortal languor spread throughout the limbs of the other. I drew nearer, and under it I read this inscription in gold letters: *Alas! this was his son.*

“On the other hand was carved a furious Sultan, plunging a ponyard into the breast of a young person, in sight of a multitude of people. Some turn’d

their heads aside, others melted in tears: and round this relievo were these words engraved: *Is it you, Nerestan?*

"As I was passing to other busto's, a sudden noise made me look back. It was made by a band of men cloath'd in long black gowns. Some carried censers, which exhaled a gross vapor; others had garlands of flowers in their hands, gather'd without choice, and disposed without taste. They march'd up to the busto's, and offered incense to them, singing hymns in two unknown languages. The smoak of their incense stuck to the busto's, and the crowns of flowers put on them made a most ridiculous sight. But the antiques soon resumed their beauty, and I saw the crowns wither and fall shriveled on the ground. There arose a quarrel amongst this set of barbarians, because some of them had not bent the knee low enough in the opinion of others; and they were on the point of coming to blows, when my guide dispersed them with one look, and re-established tranquillity in her habitation.

"Scarcely were they eclipsed, when I saw a long train of pigmies entering by an opposite door. These little men were not two cubits high, but in recompense they had very sharp teeth and very long nails. They divided into several bands, and fell on the busto's. Some endeavour'd to scratch the *basso relievo's*, and the floor was strewed with the broken pieces of their nails. Others, with greater insolence, mounted on one another's shoulders, to the highth of the heads, and gave them raps with their fists. But what diverted me much, was that these raps, instead of reaching the nose of the bust, rebounded on that of the pigmy; in consequence of which, upon a close inspection, I found most of them to be flat-nosed.

"'You see,' says my guide, 'the impudence and chastisements of these myrmidons. This war has lasted a long while, and always to their disadvantage. I use them with less severity than the black gowns. The incense of the latter might possibly disfigure the busto's; but the efforts of

the former generally end in augmenting their beauty. But as you have not above an hour or two to remain here, I advise you to pass to other objects.'

"A great curtain opened that instant, and I saw a work shop occupied by a different sort of pigmies. These had neither teeth nor nails; but in return they were armed with razors and scissers. In their hands they held heads, which seemed animated; and they were very busy with these heads, in cutting off the hair of one, pulling off the nose and ears of another; putting out the right eye of this, the left of that, and in dissecting almost all of them. After this fine operation, they viewed them attentively, and smiled, as if they thought them the prettiest heads in the world. In vain did the heads send forth loud cries, they scarcely deign'd to make them any answer. I heard one begging back its nose, and remonstrating that it could not possibly appear in public without that piece. 'My friend, head,' replied the pigmy, 'you are a fool. That nose, which you regret, disfigured you. It was long, long — You never would have made your fortune with it. But since it has been curtail'd and pared, you are charming, and you will have many a spark after you.'

"While the fate of those heads moved my compassion, at a distance I saw other more charitable pigmies, who were crawling on the ground with spectacles on. They were picking up noses and ears, and fitting them to some old heads, from which time had disengaged them. There were some of them, but those were few in number, who succeeded: the rest fixed the nose where the ear should be, and the ear where the nose: and this rendered the heads more disfigured than before.

"Being very desirous to know what all those things meant, I ask'd my guide: and she had just open'd her lips, in order to give me an answer, when I awoke in a fright."

"That was cruel," says Mangogul: "this female would have revealed a number of mysteries to you. But in her stead, I am of opinion that we ought

to address ourselves to my juggler Bloculocus." "Who?" replied the favorite. "That silly fellow, to whom you have granted the sole privilege of shewing the magic lanthorn in your court." "The same," answered the Sultan. "He will interpret your dream, or no body can. Let Bloculocus be called," says Mangogul.

CHAP. XXXVIII. Twenty-first and twenty-second Trials of the Ring.

Fricamona and Callipiga.



THE AFRICAN AUTHOR does not inform us what became of Mangogul, while he waited for Bloculocus. 'Tis very probable that he went out, catechized some Toys; and that satisfied with the intelligence he received from them, he returned to the favorite, sending forth shouts of joy, which begin this chapter. "Victory, victory!" cried he. "You triumph, madam; the castle, the porcelains, and the little Sapajou are yours."

"'Tis Egle, without doubt?" replied the favorite. "No, madam, no, 'tis not Egle," interrupted the Sultan, "but another female." "Prince," says the favorite, "envy me no longer the comfort of knowing this Phoenix." — — "Well, 'tis: who would have thought it?" "It is?" says the favorite — — "Fricamona," replies Mangogul. — — "Fricamona!" says Mirzoza: "I see no impossibility in that. This woman has spent the greatest part of her youth in a convent; and since she left it, she has led the most edifying and most retired life imaginable. No man has set his foot within her doors, and she has, in some measure, made herself the abbess of a troop of young devotees, whom she trains up to a state of perfection, and of whom her house does not grow thin. There was nothing there to answer your purpose," added the favorite, smiling and nodding her head.

"Madam, you are in the right," says Mangogul. "I have interrogated her Toy, but no answer. I doubled the virtue of my ring, by rubbing it once and again. Nothing came of it. 'To be sure,' said I to myself, 'this Toy must be deaf:' and I was preparing to leave Fricamona on the couch where I found her, when she began to speak, by the mouth I mean.

“‘Dear Acaris,’ cried she, ‘how happy am I in those moments, which I snatch from every thing that employs me, to deliver myself up to thee. After those which I pass in thy arms, these are the sweetest of my life. —— Nothing disturbs me; around me all is silence: my curtains not quite closed, let in but just as much day as is necessary for moving me to tenderness, and gazing on thee. I command my imagination: it calls thee forth, and immediately I see thee. Dear Acaris, how beautiful thou appear’st to me! —— Yes, those are thy eyes, thy smile, thy mouth. Hide not that growing bosom from me —— Let me kiss it —— I have not sufficiently gazed on it. — Let me kiss it again. Ah! let me die on it —— What fury seizes me? —— Acaris, dear Acaris, where art thou? —— Come then, dear Acaris. Ah! dear and tender friend, I swear to thee, that unknown sentiments have taken possession of my soul. It is filled with them, it is astonished at them, it is not able to contain them. —— Flow, delightful tears, flow, and ease the ardor which devours me. —— No, dear Acaris, no; that Alizali, whom thou prefer’st to me, will not love thee as I do — But I hear a noise — Ah! ’tis Acaris without doubt —— Come, dear female friend, come — —’

“Fricamona was not deceived,” continued Mangogul; “for it was Acaris herself. I left them to entertain each other; and firmly perswaded that Fricamona’s Toy would persevere in its discretion, I hurried to let you know that I have lost my wager.” “But,” replied the Sultana, “I am quite in the dark with regard to this Fricamona. Either she must be mad, or she is cruelly afflicted with vapors. No, prince, no, I have more conscience than you may imagine. I have nothing to object to this experiment: but yet I perceive somewhat in it, that hinders me from reaping any advantage by it: and I am resolved to reap none. If ever I accept your castle and porcelaines, it must be upon a better title.”

“Madam,” answered Mangogul, “I do not comprehend you. You are inconceivably difficult. Sure you have not well examined the little

Sapajou."

"Prince, I have thoroughly viewed it," replied Mirzoza. "I know it is a charming thing. But I suspect that this Fricamona is not the person I seek. If you desire that I should enjoy it one day or other, apply elsewhere."

"Faith, madam," says Mangogul after mature consideration, "I see none but Mirolo's mistress that can make you win the wager."

"Ah! prince, you dream," answered the favorite. "I am not acquainted with your Mirolo; but whosoever he be, since he has a mistress, he does not keep her for nothing."

"Very true," says Mangogul; "and yet I would lay another wager, that Callipiga's Toy knows nothing at all."

"Pray be consistent with yourself," continued the favorite. "Of two things one must happen, either that Callipiga's Toy —— But I was embarking in a ridiculous argument — Prince, do whatever you think proper: consult Callipiga's Toy; if it keep silence, so much the worse for Mirolo, and the better for me."

Mangogul departed, and found himself in an instant close to the jonquil Sopha, embroidered with silver, on which Callipiga was reposing. Scarcely had he turned his ring on her, but he heard an obscure voice, which mutter'd out the following discourse. "What do you ask me? I do not comprehend your questions. I am not as much as thought of: and yet I fancy I am as good as another. Mirolo, it is true, often passes by my door, but — —"

There is a considerable deficiency in this place. The Republic of Letters would certainty have great obligations to the person, who would restore the discourse of Callipiga's Toy, of which we have only the two last lines remaining. We invite the learned to study them, and consider whether this deficiency be not a voluntary omission of the author, dissatisfied with what he had said, and who yet found nothing better to say.

— — “It is said that my rival has altars beyond the Alps. Alas! were it not for Mirolo, the whole universe would erect some to me.”

Mangogul returned immediately to the seraglio, and repeated to the favorite the complaint of Callipiga’s Toy, word for word: for he had a wonderful memory. “Every circumstance of this story, madam,” said he, “concurs to make you win: I give up the whole wager; and you will thank Callipiga when you shall think proper.”

“Sir,” answered Mirzoza seriously, “’tis to the most confirmed virtue that I am resolved to be obliged for the wager, and not — —”

“But, madam,” replied the Sultan, “I know of none better confirmed than that which has seen the enemy so near.”

“And for my part, prince,” replied the favorite, “I understand my own meaning well: and here come Selim and Bloculocus, who shall be our judges.”

Selim and Bloculocus entered: Mangogul stated the case to them, and they both gave judgment in Mirzoza’s favor.

CHAP. XXXIX. Dreams.



"MY LORD," SAID the favorite to Bloculocus, "you must render me another piece of service. Last night a crowd of extravagant fancies disturbed my head. It was a dream of a very odd kind: and I have been assured that you are the most able person of Congo in decyphering dreams. Then give me quickly the interpretation of this;" and withal she related her own.

"Madam," answered Bloculocus, "I am but a middling Oneirocritic" —— "Pray spare these terms of art," cried the favorite: "drop your learning, and talk reason to me."

"Madam, you shall be obeyed. I have some singular notions relating to dreams: and to this alone perhaps I am indebted for the honour of conversing with you, and for the epithet of Saturnine. I will explain them to you with all the perspicuity I am capable of.

"You are not ignorant, madam," continued he, "of what the bulk of philosophers, with the rest of mankind, deliver on that subject. They say, that the objects which most sensibly struck us the preceding day, employ our soul in the night. The traces which they imprinted on the fibres of our brain, subsist. The animal spirits, accustomed to flow to certain places, pursue a course which is become familiar to them: and thence arise these involuntary images which afflict or rejoice us. In this system I should think, that a happy lover ought always to be well served by his dreams. Nevertheless it frequently happens that a person who is not cruel to him, while he is awake, in his sleep treats him like a slave; or that instead of enjoying a charming woman, he finds a little deformed monster in his arms."

"That is exactly my adventure of last night," interrupted Mangogul: "for I seldom pass a night without dreaming. It is a family disease; and we

dream from father to son, since the Sultan Togrul, who dream'd in 743500000002, and began the custom. Now, madam, last night you appeared to me," says he to Mirzoza. "'Twas your skin, your arms, your breast, your neck, your shoulders, this firm flesh, this easy shape, this incomparable *Embonpoint*, in a word it was yourself; excepting this circumstance, that instead of that charming face, that adorable head which I expected to find, I found myself nose to nose with the snout of a Dutch pug.

"I scream'd out dreadfully; my chamberlain Kotluk ran to me, and ask'd me what was the matter. 'Mirzoza,' answered I, half asleep, 'has just now undergone the most hideous metamorphosis. She is become a Dutch dog.' Kotluk did not think proper to awake me: he withdrew, and I fell asleep again: but I can assure you that I knew you wonderfully well, your body with a dog's head. Will Bloculocus give me the explanation of this phænomenon?"

"I do not despair of doing it," answered Bloculocus, "provided your highness will agree with me in one very plain principle; which is, that all beings have many conformities one with another, by qualities which are common to them: and that it is a certain combination of qualities which characterizes and distinguishes them."

"That is evident," replies Mirzoza. "Ipsiphila has feet, hands, and a mouth, like a woman of sense;" "and Pharasmena," adds Mangogul, "wears her sword like a man of courage."

"If a person is not sufficiently acquainted with the qualities, the combination of which characterizes this or that species; or if he passes a hasty judgment, that this combination does or does not belong to this or that individual; he runs the risque of mistaking copper for gold, a paste for a brillant, a calculator for a geometrician, a retailer of phrases for a wit, Crito for an honest man, and Phedima for a pretty woman," added the Sultana.

“Well, madam,” replies Bloculocus, “do you know what might be said of those who pass these judgments?”

“That they dream wide awake,” says Mirzoza.

“Very well, madam,” continued Bloculocus; “and nothing is more philosophical or more exact in a thousand circumstances than this familiar expression: *I believe you dream*: for nothing is more common than men who fancy that they reason, and in reality only dream with their eyes open.”

“’Tis of those,” interrupted the favorite, “one may literally say, that their whole life is but a dream.”

“I cannot too much admire, madam,” replied Bloculocus, “the ease with which you comprehend such abstruse notions. Our dreams are but precipitate judgments which succeed each other with incredible rapidity, and by bringing objects together, whose sole connexion is by very distant qualities, compose one whimsical image.”

“If I understand you right,” said Mirzoza, “as I think I do, a dream is a piece of patch-work, the patches of which are more in number, more regularly fitted, according as the dreamer has a more lively turn of thought, a more rapid imagination, and a more faithful memory. Might not madness also consist in this? And when an inhabitant of the *Petites Maisons* cries out that he sees lightning, hears the rattling of thunder, and that gulphs gape under his feet; or when Ariadne at her glass smiles at herself, finds her eyes sparkling, her complexion charming, her teeth white, and her mouth little; might not one justly say, that these two disordered brains, deceived by very distant affinities, look on imaginary objects as present and real?”

“You have hit it off, madam: yes, a due examination of mad folks will convince any body, that their condition is but a continual dream.”

“I have,” says Selim addressing himself to Bloculocus, “some facts by me, to which your notions are very applicable; which makes me resolve to adopt them. Once I dream’d that I heard some brayings, and that I saw two

parallel rows of singular animals coming out of the great mosque; they walk'd gravely on their hinder feet: the hoods in which their snouts were muffled up, had two holes in each, thro' which issued two long moveable hairy ears; and very long sleeves envelopped their fore feet. I rack'd my brain at the time, to find some meaning, in this vision: but I now recollect that I had been at Montmartre the preceding evening."

A hill near Paris famous for asses.

"Another time, while we were in the field, commanded by the great Sultan Erguebzed in person, and I, harassed by a forced march, was taking a nap in my tent, I thought I had the conclusion of an important affair to sollicite in the divan: I went to appear before the council of regency: but you may judge how much I had reason to be surprized. I found the hall full of racks, troughs, mangers, and coops for fowls; in the great Seneschal's easy chair I saw but an ox chewing the cud; in the Seraskier's place, a Barbary sheep; on the Testesdar's bench, an eagle with a hooked bill and long talons; instead of the Kiaja and Kadilesker, two large owls cloathed in fur; and for Visirs, geese with peacocks tails. I presented my petition, and instantly heard a horrible racket, which awaked me."

"Is that a dream of very difficult interpretation?" said Mangogul, "you had at that time some affair in the divan, and before you went thither, you took a walk to the Menagerie: but Signor Bloculocus, you tell me nothing concerning my dog's head."

"Prince," answer'd Bloculocus, "'tis a hundred to one, that madam wore, or you had observed some other lady wear a sable tippet; and that the first Dutch dog, which you saw, struck your imagination. There you have ten times more connections than is requisite to employ your mind during your sleep: the resemblance of colour made you substitute hair for a tippet, and in an instant you planted an ugly dog's head in the place of a very beautiful woman's head."

“Your notions to me appear just,” replied Mangogul: “why do you not publish them? they may contribute to the progress of divination by dreams, an important science, which was much cultivated two thousand years ago; and has since been too much neglected. Another advantage of your system is, that it would not fail throwing light on several works, both ancient and modern, which are but a string of dreams; such as Plato’s treatise of idea’s, the fragments of Hermes Trismegistus, the literary paradoxes of father Harduin, the Newton, the optic of colours, and the universal mathematicks of a certain Bramin. For example, would you not inform us, Mr. Conjurer, what Orcotomus had seen in the daytime, when he dream’d his Hypothesis; what father C —— had dreamt, when he set about constructing his organ of colours; and what was Cleobulus’s dream, when he composed his tragedy?”

“With a little meditation, Sir,” answered Bloculocus, “I might compass all that: but I reserve these nice phænomena for the time, when I shall put out my translation of Philoxenus, for which I beseech your highness to grant me the privilege.”

“With all my heart,” says Mangogul: “but who is this same Philoxenus?” — — “Prince,” replies Bloculocus, “he is a Greek author, who was very knowing in the subject of dreams.” — — “Then you understand Greek?” — — “Who I, Sir, not a syllable.” — — “Have you not told me that you are translating Philoxenus, and that he wrote in Greek?” “Yes, Sir; but in order to translate a language, it is not necessary to understand it: because translations are made for those only, who understand it not.”

“That is wonderful,” says the Sultan; “Signor Bloculocus, well then translate Greek without understanding it. I give you my word, that I will keep the secret, and it shall not make me honour you one jot the less.”

CHAP. XL. Twenty-third Trial of the Ring.

Fannia.



THERE STILL REMAIN'D a good part of the day, when this conversation was closed: which determined Mangogul to make one trial of his ring, before he retired to his appartment; tho' it were purely to fall asleep on more chearful idea's than those which had hitherto employ'd him. He went directly to Fannia's house; but found her not. He return'd thither after supper; she was still absent. Wherefore he put off his experiment to the next morning.

Mangogul, says the African author, whose Journal we translate, was at Fannia's house by half an hour after nine this morning. She was but just put to bed. The Sultan drew near her pillow, view'd her for some time, and could not conceive how, with so few charms, she had run through so many adventures.

Fannia is fair even to insipidity, tall, ungainly, with an indecent gait, no features, few *Agrémens*, and an air of intrepidity, intolerable any where but at court. As for wit, she is allowed to have just as much as gallantry can communicate: and a woman must be born very weak, if she has not acquired a stock of jargon after a score of intrigues; for Fannia was advanced thus far.

At this time she was possessed by a man suited to her character. He gave himself little or no concern about her infidelities; tho' indeed he was not as well informed as the public, how far she carried them. He had taken Fannia by caprice, and kept her by habit; like a piece of furniture. They had spent the night at the ball, went to bed at nine, and fell asleep without ceremony. Alonzo's indifference would not have suited Fannia, were it not for her easy

humour. Thus our couple were sleeping soundly back to back, when the Sultan turn'd his ring on Fannia's Toy. It instantly began to speak, its mistress to snoar, and Alonzo to awake.

After yawning several times; "this is not Alonzo, what's o'clock, who wants me? your business," said the Toy. "I think I have not been long in bed, let me take another nap."

The Toy was preparing to compose itself to rest accordingly; but that was not the Sultan's intention. "What persecution," resumed the Toy. "Once more who wants me, and for what? 'tis a misfortune to be born of illustrious ancestors: how unhappy is the condition of a titled Toy! if any thing could console me for the fatigues of my state, it would be the goodness of the nobleman, whose property I am. Oh! he is certainly the best man in the world in that regard. He has never given us the least uneasiness: and in return we have made great use of the liberty he granted us. What would have become of me, great Brama, if I had fallen to the share of one of those insipid wretches, who are always upon the watch? what a fine life we should have led!"

Here the Toy added some words, which Mangogul understood not, and then with surprising rapidity fell to sketching out a crowd of heroic, comic, burlesque, and tragicomic adventures: and it was almost out of breath, when it continued in these terms. "You see I have some memory. But I am like all others; I have retained but the smallest part of what I have been intrusted with. Be satisfied therefore with what I have related to you, I can recollect no more at present."

"'Tis pretty well," said Mangogul within himself; but still he urged afresh. "Lud, how teizing you are," resumed the Toy: "As if one had nothing better to do than to prate. Come then, since it must be so, let us prate on: perhaps when I have told all, I shall be permitted to do something else.

“My Mistress Fannia,” continued the Toy, “thro’ an inconceivable spirit of retirement, quitted the court, to shut her self up in her house at Banza. It was then the beginning of autumn, and every body was out of town. And if you ask me what she did there; Faith, I can’t tell. But Fannia never did but one thing; and if she had been employ’d that way, I should have known it. Probably she was out of work: true, I now recollect, we spent a day and a half in perfect idleness, which threw us into a cruel fit of the vapors.

“I was heart-sick of this sort of life, when Amisadar was so good to relieve us from it.— ‘Ah! you are there, my poor Amisadar, indeed you give me great pleasure. You come to me very opportunely.’ — — ‘And who knew that you were at Banza?’ replied Amisadar.— ‘No body truly; and neither you nor any one else will ever imagine what brought me hither. Don’t you guess at the cause?’ — — ‘No, really, I cannot comprehend it.’— ‘Not at all?’— ‘No, not at all.’— ‘Well then know, my dear, that I resolved to be converted’— ‘You, to be converted?’ — — ‘Yes, I’ — — ‘Look on me a little: but you are as charming as ever, and I see nothing in that countenance that bespeaks conversion. This is all pleasantry’ — — ‘No, faith, I am serious. I am determined to renounce the world. I am tired of it’ — — ‘This is a whim, that will soon fly off. Let me die, if ever you run into devotion’ — — ‘I will, I tell you: there is no sincerity in man’ — — ‘Pray has Mazul fail’d you?’ — — ‘I have not seen him this age.’ — — ‘Then it must be Zumpholo?’ — — ‘Less still, I have ceased seeing him, I can’t tell how, without thinking about it.’ — — ‘Ah! I have it, ’tis young Imola?’— ‘Good, who can fix such fribbles?’— ‘What is it then?’ — — ‘I can’t tell, I am angry with the whole earth?’ — — ‘Ah! Madam, you are in the wrong; for this earth, at which you are angry, might furnish you wherewithal to repair your losses.’ — — ‘Then, Amisadar, you sincerely believe that there are still some good souls, who have escaped from the corruption of the age, and are capable of love?’ — — ‘How, love! Is it

possible that you give into those pitiful notions? you expect to be loved, you?' — — 'And why not?' — — 'But reflect, madam, that a man who loves, pretends to be loved, and alone too. You have too much good sense, to enslave your self to the jealousies and caprices of a tender and faithful lover. Nothing so fatiguing as these folks. To see but them, to love but them, to dream of none but them, to have no wit, humour, or charms but for them; all this most certainly does not suit you. It would be pleasant to see you stive yourself up in, what is called, the noble passion, and give your self all the awkward airs of a little female cit.' 'Well, Amisadar, you seem to be in the right. I verily think it would ill become us to run into fawning love. Let us change then, since it must be so. Besides, I do not see, that those loving women, whom they set us as models, are happier than others' — — 'Who told you so, madam?' — — 'No body, but it is easily foreseen.' — — 'Trust not to such foresight? A loving woman constitutes her own, and her lover's happiness: but this part is not suited to all women.' — — 'Faith, my dear, it is suited to none: for all, who attempt it, are sufferers. What advantage is there in fixing to one?' — — 'A thousand, a woman, who fixes her affections, will preserve her reputation; will be sovereignly esteemed by the man she loves; and you cannot imagine, how much love owes to esteem.' — — 'I do not comprehend your meaning, you make a jumble of reputation, love, esteem, and I can't tell what besides. Would you be understood, that inconstancy must dishonour a woman? How, I take a man, and find he does not answer my expectations: I take another, and am still disappointed: I change him for a third, who does not turn out a jot better: and because I have had the misfortune to make a score of wrong choices, instead of pitying me, you would' — — 'I would, madam, advise a woman who has been deceived in her first choice, not to make a second; for fear of being deceived again, and running from one error into another.' — — 'Good God, what strange morality! I fancy, my dear, that you preached

me a quite different sort just now. Might one be informed what sort of woman would hit your taste?' — — 'Most willingly, madam but 'tis late, and the discourse would run into too great a length.' — — 'So much the better: I am alone, and you will be company for me. Thus the affair is settled, is it not? Seat yourself on this couch, and go on: I shall hear you more at ease.'

"Amisadar obey'd, and sate down by Fannia. 'That mantelet of yours, madam,' says he, leaning towards her, and uncovering her bosom, 'wraps you up strangely.'— 'You say right.' — — 'Why then do you hide such beautiful things?' added he, kissing them. — — 'Come, ha' done. Do you know that you are mad? You are become intolerably impudent. Mr. Moralist, resume the conversation which you began.'

"'Well then,' said Amisadar, 'I would be glad to find in my mistress a good figure, good sense, good sentiments, and decency above all. I would have her approve my attendance; not deceive me by looks; make me thoroughly sensible, once at least, that I am agreeable to her; and even inform me how I may become still more so; not conceal from me the progress I make in her heart; give ear to none but me, have no eyes but for me; neither think, nor even dream, but of me; love but me; busy herself about nothing but me; do nothing but what may tend to convince me of all this: and at length yielding herself up to my transports, let me plainly perceive that I owe every thing to my love and to hers. Oh, what a triumph, madam! And how happy is the man who possesses such a woman!' — — 'Alas, my poor Amisadar, you are certainly out of your senses. You have drawn the portrait of woman who does not exist.' — — 'Pardon me, madam, there are some in being. I own that they are rare; but yet I have had the good fortune to light of one. Alas! If death had not snatch'd her from me, for 'tis death alone that ever robs one of such women, perhaps I should be in her arms at present' — — 'But how then did you behave with her?'—

‘I loved to distraction, and miss’d no opportunity of giving her proofs of my passion. I had the sweet satisfaction of seeing that they were well received. I was scrupulously faithful to her, and she to me. The only disputes between us were, whose love was strongest; and in these little debates it was, that we laid our hearts open. We were never so fond as after this scrutiny of our souls. Our caresses always became more tender and vigorous after our explanations. Oh! what love and truth were then in our looks! I read in her eyes, and she in mine, that we burned with equal and mutual ardor.’ — — ‘And whither did all this lead ye?’ — — ‘To pleasures unknown to all mortals less amorous and sincere than us.’ — — ‘You enjoyed?’ — — ‘Yes I enjoyed, but a good on which I set an infinite value. If esteem does not intoxicate, at least it hightens the intoxication considerably. We unbosom’d ourselves without reserve, and you can’t imagine how much it strengthened our passion. The more I examined, the more perfections I discovered, and the greater were my transports. I spent half my time at her feet, and I regretted the loss of the rest. I made her happiness, and she filled up the measure of mine. I always saw her with pleasure, and always quitted her with pain. Thus we lived together: and now, madam, you may judge if loving women are so much to be pitied’ — — ‘No they are not, if what you tell me be true; but I can scarcely believe it. There is no such love as you describe. Nay, I imagine, that such a passion as you have felt, must make a man purchase the pleasures it affords at the expence of great uneasinesses.’ — — ‘I had some, madam, but I was fond of them. I felt some twitches of jealousy. The least alteration which I remarked in her countenance, spread the alarm all over my soul.’ — — ‘What extravagance! Upon mature consideration, I conclude that it is better to love in the present fashionable way; to take a lover at one’s ease, keep to him while he amuses, quit him when he becomes tiresome, or that our fancy speaks for another. Inconstancy affords a variety of pleasures unknown to you languishing

folks.' — — 'I grant that that method may be proper enough for little kept mistresses and common women; but does not suit with a man of tenderness and delicacy. At most it may amuse him, when his heart is disengaged, and he is willing to make comparisons. In a word, a woman of gallantry is by no means of my taste.' — — 'You are in the right, my dear Amisadar, you have a ravishing way of thinking. But do you love any thing at present?' — — 'Nothing, madam, but yourself; and I dare not tell you so neither.' — — 'Ah! my dear, dare on: you may continue,' replied Fannia, gazing on him stedfastly.

"Amisadar understood this reply thoroughly well, moved forward on the couch, fell to playing with a ribbon, which hung down on Fannia's breast, and he was not interrupted. His hand, meeting with no obstacle, slipt down lower. She continued to fire him with glances, which he did not misinterpret. For my part," says the Toy, "I found, he was a sensible man. He took a kiss on that neck, on which he had bestowed so many encomiums. He was desired to stop, but in such a tone as plainly shewed that she would take it ill, if he obeyed; and accordingly he did not. He kissed her hands, returned to her neck, passed to her mouth: nothing resisted him. Insensibly Fannia's leg was on Amisadar's thighs. He put his hand on it: it was soft, and Amisadar did not fail to remark it. His elogy was heard with an air of distraction. By favor of this inattention, Amisadar's hand advanced, and with rapidity reached her knees. The absence of mind still continued; and Amisadar was preparing for the charge, when Fannia came to herself. She accused the little philosopher of want of respect; but he became so absent in his turn, that he did not hear one word, or at least made no other answer to the reproaches she threw on him, but by compleating his happiness.

"What a charming man he appear'd to me! Of the multitude of those, who preceded and followed him, not one was ever so much to my taste. I

cannot mention him without panting. Pray suffer me to recover breath! I think I have spoken a pretty sufficient time, considering it is my first speech."

Alonzo did not lose one single Word of Fannia's Toy; and he was no less impatient than Mangogul to hear the remaining part of the adventure: but neither of them had time to be out of patience, when the tale-telling Toy resumed in these words.

"All that I can comprehend after serious consideration, is, that in some few days Amisadar went to the country, that he was asked the reason of his stay in town, and that he related his adventure with my mistress. For somebody of Amisadar's and her acquaintance, passing by our door, enquired either by chance or design, if madam was at home, sent in his name, and went up. — — 'Ah! madam, who could imagine you were in Banza? and how long are you here?' — — 'An age, my dear, this fortnight, that I have renounced society.' 'May I presume to ask, madam, upon what account?' — — 'Alas! because I was tired of it. Women are become such strange libertines, that there is no bearing them. One must either do as they do, or pass for a silly creature; and sincerely, I think both extremes should be avoided.' — — 'Indeed, madam, you are become quite edifying. Pray, is it the conversation of the Bramin Brelibibi, that has wrought your conversion?' — — 'No, 'tis a squall of philosophy, 'tis a quint of devotion. It seized me suddenly; and it is not poor Amisadar's fault that I am not at present practising the highest austerity.' — — 'Then madam has seen him lately?' — — 'Yes, once or twice.' — — 'And you have seen no body else.' — — 'No, truly. He is the only thinking, reasoning, active being, that has entered my doors during the eternity of my retreat.' — — 'That is singular' — — 'And what singularity is there in it?' — — 'Nothing but an adventure which he had the other day with a lady of Banza, alone like you, devout like you, retired from the world like you. But I must tell you the

story: perhaps it will amuse you.' — — 'Without doubt,' replied Fannia: and immediately Amisadar's friend set about relating his adventure word for word, as I have done," says the Toy: "and when he was advanced as far as I am now. — — 'Well, madam,' said he, 'what do you think? Is not Amisadar a lucky man?' — — 'But,' answered Fannia, 'Amisadar is a lier perhaps: do you imagine that there are women so daring as to abandon themselves without shame?' — — 'But consider, madam,' replied Maruspha, 'that Amisadar has named no body, and it is very improbable that he has imposed' — — 'I begin to see thro' the affair,' says Fannia: 'Amisadar has wit, and is a handsome man, he has, to be sure, infused some notions of sensual pleasure sure into this poor recluse, which have mastered her. Yes, this must be it: this sort of folks are dangerous to hear, and Amisadar is matchless in that way.' — — 'How, madam,' interrupted Marsupha, 'is Amisadar the only man that has the art of perswading, and will you not do justice to others, who deserve, as much as he, a share in your esteem?— 'Pray, whom do you mean?' — — 'Myself, madam, who think you a charming woman, and' — — 'I fancy you joke. Look at me then, Marsupha. I have neither paint nor patches. My night-cap does not become me. I make a frightful figure.' — — 'You are mistaken, madam: that undress sets you off surprisingly. It gives you so winning and kind an air!' ——

"To these gallantries Marsupha added others. I insensibly joined in the conversation; and when Marsupha had finished with me, he resumed with my mistress. 'Seriously, Amisadar has attempted your conversion; he has an admirable hand at conversions. Could you give me a sample of his morals? I would lay a wager they are much the same with mine.' — — 'We have thoroughly handled some points of gallantry. We have analysed the difference between an affectionate woman and a woman of gallantry. He is for the affectionate women' — — 'And you too without doubt?' — — 'Not

at all, my dear. I took great pains to demonstrate to him, that we were all alike, and that we acted upon the same principles: but he is not of this opinion. He establishes an infinity of distinctions, which, I think, exist nowhere but in his imagination. He has formed to himself, I can't tell what ideal creature, a chimæra of a woman, a non-entity in a coif.' — — 'Madam,' answered Marsupha, 'I know Amisadar. He is a lad of good sense, and has been very conversant with the sex. If he has told you that there were such' — — 'Oh! whether there are such or not,' interrupted Fannia, 'I could never conform to their customs.' — — 'I believe it,' said Marsupha: 'and accordingly you have chosen another sort of conduct more suitable to your birth and merit. Those silly creatures are to be abandoned to philosophers: they would never be look'd on at court. — —"

Here Fannia's Toy stopt short. One of the principal perfections of these orators was to break off their discourse *à propos*. They talk'd as if they had never done any thing else: whence some authors have inferr'd, that they were pure machines. In this place the African author specifies all the metaphysical arguments of the Cartesians against the soul of brutes, which he applies with all possible sagacity to the prating of Toys. In a word, his opinion is, that Toys speak as birds sing; that is to say, so perfectly without having been taught, that, to be sure, they are prompted by some superior intelligence.

But you ask me how he disposes of his prince. He sends him to dine with the favorite: at least 'tis there we shall find him in the following chapter.

CHAP. XLI. The history of Selim's travels.



MANGOGUL, WHOSE THOUGHTS ran solely on diversifying his pleasures, and multiplying the trials of his ring; after having interrogated the most interesting Toys of the court, had the curiosity to hear some of the city Toys. But as he had no advantageous opinion of what his should learn from them, he would willingly consult them at his ease, and save himself the trouble of going to find them out.

How to bring them to him, was what embarassed him. "You are in great pain for a trifle," says Mirzoza. "Sir, you have only to give a ball, and I promise you this very night a greater number of those speech-makers than you will covet to hear."

"My heart's joy, you say right," replied Mangogul; "and your contrivance is the better still, because we shall certainly have none but those whom we have occasion for." In a moment an order was dispatch'd to the Kislar-Agasi, and the master of the revels, to prepare the ball, and to distribute no more than four thousand tickets. They were probably better judges in that country than elsewhere, of the room that six thousand persons would take up.

To amuse themselves till the hour of the ball, Selim, Mangogul, and the favorite set about telling news. "Does madam know," says Selim to the favorite, "that poor Codindo is dead?" "This is the first word I heard of it, but what did he the of?" says the favorite. "Alas, madam," answered Selim, "he fell a victim to attraction. He filled his head with this system in his youth, and it turn'd his brain in his old days." "How so?" says the favorite.

"He had found," continued Selim, "by the methods of Halley and Circino, two celebrated astronomers of Monoémugi, that a certain comet, which made so much noise towards the end of Kanaglou's reign, was to

return the day before yesterday; and fearing lest it might double its steps, and he should not have the happiness of being the first to see it; he resolved to spend the night in his observatory, and yesterday morning at nine o'clock he had still his eye clung to the telescope.

"His son apprehending the consequences of so long a sitting, went to him at eight, pull'd him by the sleeve, and called him several times: *Father, Father*. Not a word of answer. *Father, Father,* repeated the young Codindo. 'It is just going to appear,' replied Codindo: 'it will appear; zounds! I shall see it.' 'But you do not consider, dear father, that there is a dismal fog' — — 'I must see it, I will see it, I tell thee.'

"The young man, convinced by these answers, that the fog had got into his father's head, called out for help. The family ran to him, and sent for Farfadi; and I was with him (for he is my physician) when Codindo's servant came. — — 'Quick, quick, Sir, make haste, old Codindo, my master' — — 'Well, what is the matter, Champagne? What has befallen your master?' — — 'Sir, he is run mad.' — — 'Thy master is run mad' — — 'Oh! yes, Sir. He cries out that he must see beasts, that he will see beasts; that they will come. The apothecary is with him already, and they wait for you. Come quickly.' — — '*Maniacal*,' says Farfadi, putting on his gown, and hunting for his square-cap; '*Maniacal*, a terrible maniacal fit.' Then turning to the servant, he ask'd: 'Does not thy master see butterflies? Does he not pick the ends of his coverlid?' — — 'Oh! no, Sir,' replied Champagne. 'The poor man is on the top of his observatory, where his wife, daughters and son have much ado to hold him. Come quickly, you will find your square-cap to-morrow.'

"Codindo's disease seemed to me to be of an odd kind: I took Farfadi in my coach, and we drove to the observatory. At the bottom of the stairs we heard Codindo crying out in a furious tone: 'I must see the comet, I will see it: withdraw ye rascals and jades.'

“In all probability his family, finding that they could not prevail on him to go down to his bed-chamber, had ordered his bed up to him: for we found him lying in bed at the top of his observatory. An apothecary of the neighbourhood, and the Bramin of the parish had been called before we arrived. The latter was trumpeting into his ear: ‘Brother, dear brother, your salvation is at stake: you cannot with a safe conscience expect a comet at this hour of the day: you damn yourself.’ — — ‘That is my business,’ said Codindo. ‘What answer will you give to Brama, before whom you are going to appear?’ replied the Bramin. — — ‘Mr. Rector,’ says Codindo, without stirring his eye from the telescope, ‘my answer shall be, that it is your trade to exhort me for my money, and the apothecary’s there, to extol his warm water to me; that the physician does his duty of feeling my pulse, and learning nothing from it; and I my own, of waiting for the comet.’ —— In vain did they teize him, they drew nothing more from him: he continued to observe with heroic courage; and he died on the leads, his left hand on his eye of that side, his right laid on the tube of the telescope, and his right eye applied close to the eye-glass; between his son, who cried that he made a false calculation; his apothecary, who proposed him a clyster, his physician, who with a toss of his head pronounced, that there was nothing more to be done; and his priest, who said to him: ‘brother, make an act of contrition, and recommend yourself to Brama. — —’”

“That is,” says Mangogul, “what they call dying in the bed of honour.” “Let us leave poor Codindo,” added the favorite, “to rest in peace, and pass to some more agreeable subject.” Then addressing herself to Selim, “my lord,” says she, “as you are so gallant at this time of life, have so much wit, talents, and so good a mien, and lived in a court devoted to pleasures; it is no wonder if the Toys have formerly celebrated your fame. But yet I suspect that they have not told all they knew of you. I do not require this supplement: you may have good reasons for refusing it. But after all the

adventures, with which this gentry have honoured you, you ought to know womankind: and this is one of those things of no consequence, which you may safely own."

"This compliment, madam," replied Selim, "would have flattered my self-love at the age of twenty: but I have gained some experience, and one of my first reflections is, that the more one practises this business, the less knowledge he obtains. I, to know women! that I have studied them much, may be allowed." "Well, what do you think of them?" said the favorite. "Madam," answered Selim, "whatsoever their Toys might have published concerning them, I esteem the whole sex as most respectable."

"Indeed, my friend," says the Sultan, "you deserve to be a Toy; you would have no occasion for a muzzle." "Selim," added the Sultana, "abandon the satyrical strain, and speak the truth." "Madam," replied the courtier, "I may possibly mix some disagreeable strokes with my narrative: do not impose the task on me of offending a sex, which has always used me well enough, and which I revere by" — — "What, always veneration! I know nothing so caustic as those sweet-tongued folks, when they set on," intermitted Mirzoza; and imagining that it was through regard for her that Selim excused himself, "Let not my presence restrain you," added she: "we are contriving to amuse ourselves; and I promise upon my honour to apply to myself all the obliging things you shall say of my sex, and to leave the rest to other women. Well, you have studied women much? Pray, give us an account of the course of your studies: it must have been very brilliant, if I may judge of it by what is known of the success: and it is reasonable to presume, that this will not be contradicted by what is unknown." The old courtier complied with her desire, and began thus.

"The Toys, I own, have talked a good deal of me: but they have not told all. Those who were capable of completing my history, either are no more, or are not in our climate: and those who have begun it, have but lightly

touched the subject. I have hitherto inviolably kept the secret which I had promised them; although I was better made to speak than they: but since they have broke silence, I think they have dispensed me from the obligation of keeping it.

"Born with a fiery constitution, I loved almost as soon as I knew what a beautiful woman was. I had governants which I detested; but in return I was much pleased with my mother's waiting-women. They were for the most part young and pretty: they conversed, dressed, and undressed before me without ceremony; they have even enticed me to take liberties with them, and my temper naturally inclining to gallantry, turned every thing to advantage. With these elements of instruction, at five or six years of age I was put under the care of men; and God knows how forward I was in improving them, when the ancient authors were put into my hands, and my tutors explained certain passages, of which possibly they themselves did not penetrate into the sense. My father's pages taught me some pretty college tricks: and the perusal of *Aloysia*, which they lent me, gave me a vehement desire of becoming perfect. I was then fourteen years of age.

"I cast my eyes around, seeking among the women who frequented the house, one to whom I might make my addresses: but they all appeared equally proper to ease me of my irksome load of innocence. A commenced acquaintance, and still more the courage I felt to attack a person of my own age, and which failed me with regard to others, determined my choice in favor of one of my cousins. Emilia was young, and so was I: I thought her pretty, and she liked me: she was not difficult, and I was enterprizing: I had a mind to learn, and she was not less curious to know. We frequently asked one another very frank and strong questions: and one day she deceived the vigilance of her governants, and we instructed each other. Ah! how great a master is nature! it soon set us in the high road of pleasure, and we abandoned ourselves to its impulse, without the least thought of the

consequences: and this was not the way to prevent them. Emilia had indispositions, which she took the less pains to hide, as she did not suspect the cause. Her mother examined her, extorted a confession of our commerce, and my father was informed of it. He made me some reprimands blended with an air of satisfaction; and it was immediately resolved that I should travel. I set out with a governor, who was charged to watch my conduct attentively, but not to put me under any restraint: and five months after, the gazette informed me, that Emilia died of the small pox; and a letter from my father, that her tenderness for me had cost her her life. The first fruit of my love serves with distinction in the Sultan's army: I have always supported him by my credit, and to this day he knows me solely as his protector.

"We were at Tunis, when I received the news of his birth and his mother's death. Her fate touched me to the quick, and I believe I should have been inconsolable, had I not embarked in an intrigue with a sea-captain's wife, who did not afford me time to run into despair. The Tunetine was intrepid, and I was fool-hardy: for with the assistance of a rope-ladder, which she threw to me, I passed every night from my lodging on her terrass, and thence into a closet, where she put the finishing hand to my instructions; Emilia having only made a beginning. Her husband return'd from a cruize, just at the time, that my governor, who had received his instructions, urged me to cross over into Europe. I embarked on board a vessel bound for Lisbon, but not without several times taking leave of Elvira, from whom I received this diamond.

"The vessel, in which we sailed, was laden with merchandise; but the most valuable commodity on board, to my taste, was the captain's wife. She was not quite twenty: and her husband was as jealous of her as a tyger, and not quite without cause. We all soon understood one another: Donna Velina perceived that I had a liking for her; I, that I was not indifferent to her; and

her husband, that he incommoded us. The sailor resolved not to lose sight of us till we were landed at Lisbon. I read in the eyes of his dear wife, how much she fretted at her husband's assiduity: mine testified the same things to her, and the husband understood us wonderfully well. We spent two whole days in an inconceivable thirst of pleasure; which would certainly have kill'd us, had not heaven assisted us: but it always assists souls in pain. Just upon our passing the Streights of Gibraltar, a furious tempest arose. I would not fail, madam, to raise the winds about your ears, and make thunder rattle over your head; to set the heavens on fire with lightning; raise the billows up to the clouds, and describe the most horrid tempest which you have ever met with in any romance; were I not giving you a history. I shall only tell you, that the captain was compelled by the sailors cries to quit his room, and expose himself to one danger for fear of another. He went up on deck together with my governor, and I threw myself without hesitation into the arms of my fair Portuguese; quite forgetting that there was any such thing in nature as a sea, storms, or tempests; that we were on board a tottering vessel; and abandoning myself without reserve to the perfidious element. Our course was rapid, and you may well judge, madam, by the weather at that time, that I saw a great deal of land in a few hours. We put in at Cadiz, where I left a promise with the Signora to meet her at Lisbon, if my Mentor agreed to it, whose design was to go directly to Madrid.

"The Spanish women are more closely confined, and more amorous than ours. Love is managed in that country by a sort of ambassadresses, who have orders to catechize strangers, to make proposals to them, to conduct them forward and backward; and the ladies undertake the task of making them happy. I was not obliged to go through this ceremony, thanks to the conjuncture. A great revolution had lately placed a prince of the blood royal of France on the throne of this kingdom: his arrival and coronation

occasioned festivals at the court, where I then appeared. I was accosted at a masquerade; and a meeting was proposed me for the next day: I accepted the challenge, and went into a little house, where I found only one man mask'd, his nose wrapp'd in his cloak, who delivered me a letter, in which Donna Oropeza put off the party to the next day at the same hour. I returned, and was introduced into an appartment sumptuously furnish'd, and well illuminated with wax tapers. My goddess did not make me wait long. She enter'd just at my heels, and rush'd into my arms without speaking a word, or taking off her mask. Was she ugly? Was she handsome? was what I knew not. I only perceived on the couch, to which she drew me, that she was young, well-made, and loved pleasure. When she found herself satisfied with my panegyricks, she unmask'd, and shewed me the original of this picture, which you see in my snuff-box."

Selim open'd, and at the same time presented the favorite with a gold box, of exquisite work, and richly adorn'd with jewels. "The present is gallant," says Mangogul: "what I esteem most in it," added the favorite, "is the portrait. What eyes! What a mouth! what a neck! But is not all this hightened?" "So little, madam," replied Selim, "that Oropeza would probably have fixed me at Madrid, if her husband, informed of our commerce, had not disturbed it by his threats. I loved Oropeza, but I loved life better still. Besides, my governor was not of opinion, that I should expose myself to be poniarded by the husband, for the sake of enjoying his wife some few months more. Wherefore I wrote to the fair Spanish Donna a very moving farewel letter, which I stole out of some romance of that country, and set out for France.

"The monarch, who then reigned in France, was the king of Spain's grandfather, and his court was justly esteemed the most magnificent, most polite, and most gallant in Europe. I appeared there as a phænomenon. 'A young lord of Congo,' says a beautiful marquise. 'That must be surely very

diverting: those men are better then ours. I think Congo is not far from Morocco.' Suppers were given, to which I was invited. Let my discourse have ever so little sense in it, it was found fine, admirable: people retracted, who had at first done me the honour to suspect that I had not common sense. 'He is a charming man,' says another court lady briskly: 'it would be murther to suffer so pretty a figure to return into a wretched country, where the women are narrowly watched by men who are no longer so. Is it true, sir? 'Tis said, that they have nothing. That is very unseemly in a man.' —— 'But,' adds another, 'we must keep this great boy here, (for he is well born) tho' he were only made a knight of Malta. I engage, if you will, to procure him an employment; and the dutchess Victoria, my old friend, will speak to the king in his favor, if it be requisite.'

"I soon had indubitable proofs of their good-will, and I put the marquise into a condition of pronouncing on the merit of the inhabitants of Morocco and Congo. I found that the employment, which the dutchess and her friend had promised me, was difficult to execute, and therefore gave it up. It was in this recess that I learned to form those noble passions of twenty-four hours. I circulated during six months in a vortex, where the beginning of an adventure did not wait for the end of another; because enjoyment was the only thing intended. Or if that was slow in coming, or as soon as it was obtained, we ran upon the scent of new pleasures." "What do you tell me, Selim?" interrupted the favorite. "Decency is then unknown in those countries?" "Pardon me, madam," replied the old courtier. "They have scarcely any other word in their mouths. But the French women are no more slaves to the thing than their neighbors." "What neighbors?" says Mirzoza. "The English women," replied Selim, "who are cold and scornful in appearance, but passionate, voluptuous, vindictive; less witty and more rational than the French women. These love the jargon of sentiment, those prefer the expression of pleasure. But at London as at Paris, people love,

separate, rejoin to separate again. From the daughter of a lord bishop (these are a sort of Bramins who do not keep celibacy) I passed to a baronet's wife. While he was warmly supporting the interest of the nation in the house of commons, against the attempts of the court; his wife and I had quite different debates in his house. But the session was closed, and madam was obliged to attend her knight to his manor. I then light upon a colonel's wife, whose regiment was quartered along the sea-coast: I afterwards belong'd to the lady mayoress. Ah, what a woman! I should never have seen Congo again, if the prudence of my governor, who saw me wasting away, had not redeemed me from this gally. He counterfeited letters from my family, which recalled me with all possible expedition, and we embarked for Holland: our design was to travel through Germany into Italy, where we expected frequent opportunities of vessels to carry us to Afric.

"We saw Holland only in riding post; and did not tarry much longer in Germany. All the women of rank there resemble important citadels, which must be besieged in form. They are to be reduced, but the approaches require so many measures, there are so many *ifs* and *buts*, when the articles of capitulation are to be settled, that those conquests soon tired me.

"I shall never forget the expression of a German lady of the first quality, on the subject of granting me what she had not refused to several others. 'Alas!' cried she mournfully, 'what would my father the great Alkizi say, if he knew that I abandon myself to such a low creature as a Congese.' 'He shall say nothing, madam,' replied I: 'so much grandeur affrights me, and I withdraw.' It was wisely done of me; for if my mediocrity had compromised with her highness, I might have repented it. Brama, who protects the wholesome climes, which we inhabit, inspired me without doubt in this critical moment.

"The Italian ladies, whom we frequented afterwards, are not mounted on so high a pin. It was with them that I learned the modes of pleasure. There

is indeed much caprice and whim in those refinements; but you will pardon me, ladies, if I say, that sometimes there is no pleasing you without them. From Venice and Rome I brought some merry receipts before my time unknown in our barbarous country. But I restore all the glory of them to the Italian women, who communicated them to me.

"I spent about four years in Europe, and returned through Egypt into this empire, modelled as you see, and stock'd with the rare secrets of Italy, which I soon divulged."

Here, says the African author, Selim perceiving that the common place language, which he held to the favorite on his adventures in Europe, and on the characters of the women of the countries through which he passed, had plunged Mangogul into a deep sleep, was afraid of awaking him; and therefore drew near to the favorite, and continued in a lower voice.

"Madam," said he, "were I not apprehensive that I have tired you by a narrative, which has perhaps been already too long; I would relate you the adventure, by which I commenced my operations on my arrival at Paris: I cannot think how it has escaped me."

"Tell it, my good friend," answered the favorite; "I will double my attention, and make amends, as much as I am able, for the Sultan's inattention, who sleeps."

"At Madrid," continued Selim, "we had taken recommendations for some lords of the court of France, and at our setting foot in Paris we found ourselves loaded with protestations of friendship. It was then the pleasant season of the year, and in the evenings my governor and I went to walk in the gardens of the Palais Royal. One day we were joined there by some *Petits-Maitres*, who shewed us the most celebrated beauties, and gave us their history, true, or false, not forgetting themselves on every occasion, as you may well imagine. The garden was already stock'd by a great number of women; but there arrived a considerable reinforcement about eight

o’clock. By the quantity of their jewels, the magnificence of their dress, and the crowd of their attendants, I took them for dutchesses at least. I spoke my thoughts to one of the young lords of the company, whose answer was, that he found I was a connoisseur; and if I was inclined, I should have the pleasure of supping that very night with some of the most lovely of them. I accepted his offer, and in an instant he slipt a word into the ears of two or three of his friends, who dispersed themselves into different parts of the walks, and in less than a quarter of an hour returned to give us an account of their negotiation. ‘Gentlemen,’ said they to us, ‘you are expected this night to supper at the dutchess Asteria’s.’ Those who were not of the party, congratulated us on our good fortune: and after some turns in the gardens, they left us, and we went into our coach, in order to reap the benefit of it.

“We alight at a little door, at the foot of a very narrow pair of stairs, where we climbed up to a second floor; and I found the appartments more spacious and better furnished than they would appear to me at present. I was presented to the mistress of the house, to whom I made one of the most profound reverences, which I accompanied with so respectuous a compliment, that she was almost unhinged. Supper was served up, and I was seated next to a little charming person, who fell to acting the dutchess to admiration. Truly I can’t tell how I dared to fall in love with her: but so it was.”

“Then you have loved once in your life,” interrupted the favorite. “Oh! yes, madam,” replied Selim, “as people love at eighteen years of age, with extreme impatience to conclude an affair just broach’d. I had not a wink of sleep all that night, and at dawn of day I set about composing a most gallant letter to my *Belle*. I sent it, received an answer, and obtained a meeting. Neither the style of the answer, nor the yielding temper of the lady, did undeceive me; and I flew to the place of assignation, strongly perswaded that I was going to enjoy the wife or daughter of a prime minister. My

goddess was waiting for me on a grand couch: I threw myself at her feet, took her hand, kissed it with uncommon eagerness, and felicitated myself on the favor which she condescended to grant me. ‘Is it true,’ said I, ‘that you permit Selim to love you, and to tell you so; and that he may, without offending you, flatter himself with the sweetest hope?’ On ending these words, I snatch’d a kiss from her neck; and as she was recumbent I was preparing to support the attack with vigor, when she stop’d me, and said: ‘Hold, my friend, you are a pretty lad, you have wit at will, you talk like an angel; but I must have four *Louis d’or’s*.’ ‘What do you say,’ interrupted I. — — ‘I tell you,’ replied she, ‘there is nothing to be done, if you have not brought four *Louis*’ — — ‘How, miss,’ said I quite amazed, ’is that your full value? It was well worth my while, to be sure, to come from Congo for such a trifle.’ And in a moment I put myself in order, hurried down stairs, and left her.

“I began, madam, as you see, to mistake actresses for princesses.” “I am quite astonished at it,” replied Mirzoza, “surely the difference is very great.” “I doubt not,” said Selim, “but they were guilty of a hundred impertinences. But what then? A young man, and a stranger too, is not so nice an observer. And I had heard so many bad stories in Congo, on the liberties taken by the European women. — —”

Here Mangogul awak’d, and yawning and rubbing his eyes, said: “By the L — d, he is still at Paris. Might one ask you, good Mr. Story-teller, when you expect to be return’d to Banza, and how long I am doomed to sleep: for ’tis proper you should know, my friend, that it is not possible to broach an account of travels without throwing me into yawnings. It is a bad habit, which I contracted in reading Tavernier and other travellers.”

“Prince,” answered Selim, “it is above an hour since I am come back to Banza.”

“I congratulate you thereupon,” replied the Sultan; and then turning to the Sultana, “madam,” said he, “the hour appointed for the masquerade is come: we will set out, if the fatigue of the journey permits you.”

“Prince,” answered Mirzoza, “I am ready.” Mangogul and Selim slipt on their Domino’s, and the favorite took hers likewise: the Sultan handed her to the ball-room where they separated, in order to mix in the crowd. Selim followed them, “and so did I,” says the African author; “tho’ I had a stronger inclination to take a nap than to see the dancing.”

CHAP. XLII. Twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth trial of the ring.

Masquerade, and sequel of the masquerade.

THE MOST EXTRAVAGANT Toys of Banza did not fail flocking whither pleasure called them. Some came in city-coaches, some in public vehicles, and some few on foot. “I should never finish,” says the African author, whose trainbearer I have the honour to be, “if I enter’d into a detail of the tricks which Mangogul play’d on them.” He gave more exercise to his ring that night alone, than it ever had had, since the Genius presented him with it. He turn’d it sometimes on one, sometimes on another, and frequently on twenty together; and then it was, that the noise they made was ravishing; One cried out with a squeaking voice, “Violins, pray give us *le Carillon de Dunkerque*;” another in a hoarse voice, “I will have the *Sautriots*;” “and I the *Tricotets*,” said a third: and a multitude at once call’d for old country-dances, such as *la Bourée, les quatre faces, la Calotine, la Chaine, le Pistolet, la Mariée, le Pistolet, le Pistolet, le Pistolet*. All these cries were interlarded with a million of extravagances. On one side was heard: *Plague take the noodle, let him be sent to school.* On another, *Must I return then without my earnest?* Here, *who pays my coach?* There, *he has slipt away from me, but I’ll hunt him till I find him.* And again, *till to-morrow; but twenty Louis’s at least, or there’s nothing to be done.* And every where in short, speeches, which expressed desires or exploits.

In the crowd, a citizen’s daughter, young and pretty, singled out Mangogul, pursued him, and provoked him so, that he turned his ring on her. Then was her Toy heard to cry out: “Why do you fly me? Stop, charming mask, be not insensible to the ardor of a Toy, which burns for you.” The Sultan shock’d at this rash declaration, was determined to punish

the forward creature. He disappear'd, and sought among his guards some one who was pretty much of his make, gave him his mask and Domino, and abandoned him to the pursuits of the little female cit; who being still deceived by appearances, continued to say a thousand ridiculous things to him, whom she took for Mangogul.

The sham Sultan was no fool, he was one of those who could talk by signs: he made one, which drew the *Belle* into a lonesome place, where, for above an hour, she imagined herself the favorite Sultana, and God knows what mighty projects were working in her brain. But the enchantment lasted not long. After she had surfeited the pretended Sultan with caresses, she pray'd him to unmask; which he did, and shewed a physiognomy armed with a large pair of whiskers, which did not belong to Mangogul. "Oh! fy," cried the little wench, "fie"— "Fell mine little Shoul," answered the Swiss, "fat you ail? Me tought mee done you kood services enof, dat you no be angry at nowing mee." But his goddess, without answering him, slipt nimbly thro' his hands, and was lost in the crowd.

But even such of the Toys as did not aspire to so great honours, did not fail of lighting on pleasure: and they all took the road back to Banza, thoroughly satisfied with their journey.

As the company was withdrawing, Mangogul overheard two of his principal officers at high words. "She is my mistress," says one, "I have kept her these twelve months, and you are the first who has taken it into his head to tread on my heels. Why do you make me uneasy? Nasses, my friend, apply elsewhere; you will find a hundred lovely women, who will think themselves too happy to possess you." "I love Amina," replied Nasses. "I see none but her, who takes my fancy. She has given me hopes, and you will give me leave to pursue them." "Hopes!" replied Alibeg — — "Yes, hopes" — — "Zounds, that is not" — — "I tell you, Sir, that it is, and I expect satisfaction this moment for the lye you give me." Down they went

immediately into the court yard; their scymeters were already drawn, and they were on the point of ending their dispute in a tragical manner, when the Sultan stop'd them, and forbid them to fight, before they had consulted their *Helena*.

They obeyed, and went to Amina's house, and Mangogul close after them. "The ball has quite spent me," said she: "my eyes are dropping out of my head. You are very cruel folks, to come the moment I was ready to get into bed: but both of ye look very oddly. May I be informed what brings ye hither?" — — "A trifle," replied Alibeg. "This gentleman boasts, and even loftily," added he, shewing his friend, "that you give him hopes. Madam, how stands this matter?" — Amina was opening her mouth, but the Sultan turning his ring that very instant, she closed it, and her Toy answered for her — — "In my opinion Nasses is mistaken: no, it is not he that madam chooses. Has he not a lusty footman who is a better man? Oh! how foolish these men are in imagining that dignities, honours, titles, names, words void of meaning, impose on Toys. Every one has his own philosophy, and ours consists in distinguishing personal merit, true merit, from that which is but imaginary. With Monsieur de Claville's leave, he knows less of that subject than we; which I will prove.

"You are both acquainted," continued the Toy, "with the marchioness Bibicosa. You know her amours with Cleandor, as also her disgrace, and the high devotion she professes at this day. Amina is a good friend; she has constantly kept up her former intimacy with Bibicosa, and has not ceased frequenting her house, where all sorts of Bramins are met with. On a certain day one of these pressed my mistress to speak to Bibicosa in his favor. 'Pray, what would you have me ask of her?' replied Amina. 'She is a drowned woman, who can do nothing for herself. To be sure, she will be much obliged to you for treating her still as a person of consequence. Believe me, my friend, prince Cleandor and Mangogul will never do any

thing for her, and you may freeze in the anti-chambers.' — — 'But, madam,' replied the Bramin, 'the affair is but a trifle, which entirely depends on the marchioness: and this it is. She has built a little chapel in her house, doubtless for the Sala, which supposes an Iman: and 'tis this place which I ask' — — 'What say you?' says Amina. 'An Iman: you don't consider: the marchioness wants only a Marabou, whom she will call from time to time, when it rains, or when she chooses to have the Sala, before she goes to bed: but an Iman lodged, cloathed, dieted in her house, with a salary, does not suit Bibicosa. I know her affairs. The poor woman has not six thousand Zecchins a year, and you expert her to give two thousand of it to an Iman. Surely this is a strange fancy.' — — 'By Brama,' replied the holy man, 'I am sorry for it: for if I had once got to be her Iman, I should soon become more necessary to her; and when one is got thus far, it rains gold and pensions. Howsoever I may appear to you, I am of Monomotapa, and do my duty extremely well.' — — 'Upon second thoughts,' answered Amina, with panting interruptions, 'your affair is not perhaps impossible. Pity it is, that the merit you speak of is not known.' — — 'One runs no risque in doing good offices to persons of my country,' replied the Monomotapan, 'pray behold.' —— He forthwith gave Amina a complete proof of such surprising merit, that from that moment you lost in her eyes half the value she put on you. Well! long live the Monomotapans."

Alibeg and Nasses made long faces, and look'd on each other without uttering a word: but when they had recovered from their astonishment, they mutually embraced; and casting disdainful looks on Amina, they ran prostrate themselves at the Sultan's feet, and thank him for having undeceived them with regard to this woman, and preserved their lives and reciprocal friendship. They arrived just as Mangogul, return'd to the favorite, was relating Amina's history to her. It made Mirzoza laugh, but did not augment her esteem for the court ladies and the Bramins.

CHAP. XLIII. Selim at Banza.

FROM THE MASQUERADE Mangogul went immediately to take rest; but the favorite finding that she had no inclination to sleep, sent for Selim, and pressed him to continue the history of his amours. Selim obeyed, and resumed the discourse in these terms.

"Madam, galantry did not fill up all my time: I snatched some moments from pleasure, which I bestowed on serious occupations; and the intrigues in which I was embarked, did not prevent my learning fortification, riding, fencing, music and dancing; observing the customs and arts of the Europeans, and studying their politicks and military art. On my return to Congo, I was presented to the Emperor, grandfather to the Sultan, who granted me an honourable post in his troops; and I soon was made one of all the parties of the prince Erguebzed, and consequently concerned in the adventures of pretty women. I was acquainted with some of all nations, ages, and conditions, and found very few cruel; whether it was that my rank dazzled them, that my prattle pleased them, or my person struck them. At that time I had two qualities, with which a rapid progress is made in love-affairs; assurance and presumption.

"At first I dealt among the women of quality. I took them in the evening in the circle, or at play at the Manimonbanda's: I passed the night with them, and we hardly knew each other in the morning. One of the occupations of these ladies, is to procure lovers, nay, to decoy them away from their best female friends; and the other, to get rid of them. Thro' apprehensions of ever being unprovided, while they are enjoying the sweets of one intrigue, they squint at two or three others. They possess a number of little arts to attract the man they have in view, and a thousand tricks in reserve, to disengage themselves from their present spark. This has always

been, and always will be. I shall name no body; but I knew every woman of Erguebzed's court, who had any reputation for youth and beauty; and all these engagements were formed, broken off, resumed, forgot, in less than six months.

"Disgusted with that world, I passed into its antipodes. I visited the citizen's wives, whom I found dissembling, vain of their beauty, perched on the pinacle of honour, and almost constantly beset with savage brutal husbands, or certain splaw-footed cousins, who acted the passionate lovers with their female cousins from morning till night, and were very disagreeable to me. It was impossible to be alone with these women one moment. Those animals broke in upon us perpetually, disconcerted a rendezvous; and thrust themselves into all our conversations. These obstacles notwithstanding, I brought five or six of these prattling creatures to my intended point, before I finished with any one of them. What diverted me much in their commerce, was, that they piqued themselves, on delicacy of sentiments, and I must value myself on the same; and they talk'd on that subject eno' to make one die with laughing. Besides, they required assiduity of attendance; and in their dialect I was continually deficient in this point. They preached such correct love, that there was a necessity of renouncing it. But the worst of all was, that they had your name eternally in their mouths, and that sometimes one was obliged to appear in public with them, and incur all the ridicule of a city adventure. Wherefore on a fine summer's day I bid adieu to their shops and the whole rue St. Denis for ever.

"People had then the madness of keeping private lodges. I hired one in the eastern suburb, and there successively had some of those girls who are seen and not seen; to whom one speaks, and says not a word; and whom we discard, when tired of them. I frequently mustered a set of friends and opera actresses together, and gave little suppers, which prince Erguebzed now and

then honoured with his presence. Ah! madam, I had delicious wines, exquisite cordials, and the best cook in Congo.

“But nothing gave me so great amusement as an enterprize which I executed in a province remote from the capital, where my regiment was in quarters. I set out from Banza to review it; and as that was my only business, I should have been quickly back, were it not for the extravagant project to which I devoted myself. At Baruthi there was a monastery of very beautiful nuns. I was young and beardless; and I contrived how to get admission under the disguise of a widow, who sought an asylum against the dangers of the age. I ordered womens cloaths to be made for me, then dressed myself, and went to offer myself at the grate of those recluses. I met with a very tender reception: they comforted me for the loss of my husband; the price of my board was agreed on, and in I went.

“The appartment appointed me had a communication with the dormitory of the novices. They were very numerous, most of them young, and of a surprising bloom. I was extremely polite to them, and soon became their bosom friend. In less than eight days I was let into all the interests of the little republic, informed of the several characters, and instructed in their secret history; I received confidences of all colours, and found that detraction and calumny are not better managed by us profane mortals. I observed their rules with severity, catch’d the wheedling air and smooth canting tone: and they whispered to each other, that the community would be happy, if I took the habit.

“No sooner had I thought my reputation established in the house, but I fixed upon a young virgin, who had just taken the first veil. She was an adorable nut-brown girl: she called me her mamma, and I called her my little angel. She gave me innocent kisses, and I returned very tender ones. Youth is curious: Zirziphila put me daily on the subject of matrimony, and the pleasure of husbands, and desired me to inform her: I artfully whetted

her curiosity; and from question to question I led her to the practice of the lessons which I gave her. She was not the only novice that I instructed; and some young nuns came likewise to be edified in my cell. I managed the hours and meetings so dexterously, that no one interfered with another. In fine, madam, what shall I tell you? The pious widow made a numerous progeny. But when the scandal, which caused many a secret sigh, broke out, and a council of discreet matrons met, and sent for the physician of the convent; I meditated my retreat. Wherefore in the dead of the night, when the whole house was asleep, I scaled the garden wall, and disappeared. I went to the waters of Piombino, whither the physician had sent half the convent; and there, in the habit of a cavalier, I finished the work, which I had begun under that of a widow. This, madam, is a fact which the whole empire remembers, and of which you alone know the author.

"The rest of my youth," added Selim, "was spent in the like amusements, always women, and of all sorts, seldom any mystery, a number of oaths, and no sincerity." "But at this rate," says the favorite, "you have never been in love?" "Psha!" replied Selim, "I thought much of love at that time; I aim'd at pleasure only, and at those women who were most likely to afford it me" — — "But," interrupted the favorite, "is there any pleasure without loving? What can it be, when the heart says nothing?" "Alas! madam," rejoined Selim, "is it the heart that speaks at the age of eighteen or twenty?"

"But in fine, what is the result of all these experiments? What have you pronounced on women?"

"That most women have no character at all," says Selim. "That they are most powerfully influenced by three things, interest, pleasure and vanity; that perhaps there is not one of them who is not governed by one of these passions; and that those who join all the three together, are monsters."

"As for pleasure, that I can allow them," said Mangogul, who had just then joined the company: "though little dependance can be had on this sort

of women, yet they are to be excused. When the constitution is wound up to a certain pitch, it is an unruly horse, which carries his rider over hedges and ditches; and most women are mounted astride on that beast." "'Tis probably for that reason," says Selim, "that the dutchess Menega calls the Chevalier Kaidar her master of the horse."

"But is it possible," says the Sultana to Selim, "that you have not had the least adventure, in which the heart was concerned. Will your sincerity tend only to dishonour a sex which constituted your pleasures, if you were their darling. What! in so great a number of women, not one that desired, and even deserved to be beloved; that is not to be conceived."

"Ah! madam," replied Selim, "I feel, by the readiness with which I obey you, that years have not weakened the empire of a lovely woman over my heart. Yes, madam, I have loved like other folks. You desire to know all; I am going to tell all, and you will judge if I have performed a lover's part in all the forms."

"Are there any travels in this part of your history?" says the Sultan. "No, prince," replied Selim. "So much the better," says Mangogul, "for I find no propensity to sleep."

"For my part," rejoined the favorite, "Selim will allow me to take a little rest."

"Let him go to bed likewise," says the Sultan; "and while ye both are reposing, I will interrogate Cypria."

"But, prince," answered Mirzoza, "your highness does not reflect, that that Toy will lead you into a string of voyages without end."

The African author informs us in this place, that the Sultan, struck with Mirzoza's observation, took care to provide a most powerful antihypnotic. He adds, that Mangogul's physician, being his intimate friend, had given him the prescription, and that he had put it in to the preface of his book: but

of that preface there remains no more than; the three last lines, which are as follow.

Take of ——
of ——
of ——
of *Mariamne, and the Paysan Par*, four pages.
of the *Egaremens du Coeur*, one sheet.
of the *Confessions*, twenty five lines and a half.

CHAP. XLIV. Twenty-sixth trial of the Ring.

The rambling Toy.



WHILE THE FAVORITE and Selim were reposing after the fatigues of the preceding day, Mangogul was viewing with astonishment the magnificent appartments of Cypria. This woman had, by means of her Toy, made a fortune equal to that of a general farmer of the revenue. After having been through a long row of chambers, each surpassing the other in richness and elegance of furniture, he came to the great salon; where, in the midst of a numerous circle, he distinguished the mistress of the house by the enormous quantity of jewels, which disfigured her; and her husband, by the good-manship painted on his countenance. Two *Abbés*, a wit, and three academicians of Banza, were posted at the sides of Cypria's easy chair; and towards the end of the salon fluttered about two *Petits-Maitres*, and a young magistrate full of airs, blowing on his ruffles, incessantly adjusting his peruke, visiting his mouth, and complimenting himself in the glass that his paint held on so well. Except these three butterflies, all the company was in profound veneration for the honorable mummy, who was seated in an indecent posture, yawned, spoke while she yawned, judged of every thing, judged ill of every thing, and was never contradicted. "How," said Mangogul within himself, who had not talked alone of a long time, and was chagrined at it; "how came she to have it in her power to dishonor a man of a good family, with so wrong a turn of mind, and such a figure as she makes?" Cypria would fain pass for fair; tho' her skin, tawney striped with red, had a good resemblance with a variegated Tulip. With large eyes, she was short-sighted; she was of a squat shape, crowded features, with a long slender nose, a flat mouth, hollow cheeks, and a narrow forehead; no neck, a dry hand, and skinny arm. With those charms it was, that she inchanted

her husband. The Sultan turn'd his ring on her, and instantly she began to open. The company were deceived, thinking that Cypria spoke from her mouth, and that she was going to pass judgment: whereas her Toy began in these words.

"The history of my travels. I was born in Morocco, in the year 17000000012; and I danced on the stage of the opera, when Mehemet Tripathoud, who kept me, was named ambassador extraordinary from our potent emperor to the monarch France. I followed him in this ambassy. The charms of the French women soon robbed me of my lover; and I speedily made reprisals. The courtiers greedy of novelty, would needs try Maroquine: for thus they nick-named my mistress. She treated them with great humanity; and her affability in six months brought her in twenty thousand crowns in jewels, as much more in cash, and a neat well furnished house. But the French are fickle, and I soon ceased to be in fashion. I did not mispend my time in galloping about the provinces: great talents require vast theatres. I suffered Tripathoud to return without me; and I devoted myself to the metropolis of another kingdom.

"Un my lord tres opulent, qui voyageoit en France, m'entraina a Londres. Oui, c'etoit la vraiment un homme. Il m'arrosoit six fois par jour, et six autres fois par nuit. Son v — t lancoit des dards de feu, comme la queue d'une Comete. Jamais n'ai-je ressenti des bottes si vives et si bien appliquées. Mais il n'etoit pas possible à la prouesse humaine de continuer ce train long tems: aussi se rallentit-il peu à peu, et je recus son ame distillée par son *Penis*. Il me fit present de cinquante mil guinées. A ce noble Seigneur succederent deux amateurs nouvellement revenus de course. Comme ils etoient amis intimes, ils me chevauchoient, comme ils avoient voyagés, en compagnie; chacun faisant tous ses efforts pour surpasser l'autre en vigeur et en feu. Pendant que l'un etoit a la rade, je remorqueois l'autre par son v — t, et je le preparois à une nouvelle attaque. Par un calcul

tres moderé je contai cent quatre-vingt coups de balles, que je recus en huit jours. Mais je m'ennuiai bientot de tenir un compte si exacte: car leurs bordées ne finissoient pas. Ils me payerent douze mil guinées pour ma part des captures qu'ils avaient faites. Dés que l'hiver fut passé, ils furent contraints de mettre à la voile; et ils auroient bien voulu m'engager en qualité d'Allege: mais j'avois deja fait contract avec un Comte Allemand.

"Duxit me Viennam in Austria patriam suam, ubi venereâ voluptate, quantâ maximâ poteram, ingurgitatus sum, per menses tres integros ejus splendidè nimis epulatus hospes. Illi, rugosi et contracti Lotharingo more colei, et eo usque longa crassaque mentula, ut dimidiam nondum acciperem, quamvis iterato coitu fractus rictus mihi miserè pateret. Immanem ast usu frequenti vagina tandem admisit laxè gladium; novasque excogitavimus artes, quibus fututionum quotidianaram vinceremus fastidium. Modò me resupinum agitabat; modò ipsum, eques adhærescens inguinibus, motu quasi tolutario versabam. Sæpe turgentem spumantemque admovit ori priapum, simulque appressis ad labia labiis, fellatrice me linguâ perfricuit. Etsi veneri nunquam indulgebat posticæ, à tergo me tamen adorsus, cruribus altera sublato, altera depresso, inter femora subibat, voluptaria quærens per impedimenta transire. Amatoria Sanchesii præcepta calluit ad unguem, et festivas Aretini tabulas sic expressit, ut nemo melius. His a me laudibus acceptis, multis florenorum millibus mea solvit obsequia, et Romam secessi.

"Quella Citta è il tempio de Venere, ed il soggiorno delle delizie. Tuttavia mi dispiaceva, que le natiche leggiadre sossero là encora più festeggiate delle più belle potte; quello che provai il terno giorno del mio arrivo in quel paese. Una Cortigiana illustre si offerisce a farmi guadagnare mila scudi, s'io voleva passar la sera con esso lei in una vigna. Accettai l'invito; salimmo in una carozza, e giungemmo in un luogo da lei ben conosciuto, nel quale due cavaliere colle braghenesse rosse si fecero

incontro à noi, e ci condussero in un boschetto spesso e solto, dove cavatosi subito le vesti, vedemmo i più furiosi cazzi che risaltero mai. Ogn'uno chiavò la sua. Il trastullo poi si prese à quadrille, dopo per farsi guattare in bocca, poscia nelle tette; alla perfine, uno de chiavatori impadronissi del mio rivale, mentro l'altro mi lavorava. L'istesso fu fatto alla conduttrice mia; e ciò tutto dolcemente condito di bacci alla fiorentina. E quando i campioni nostri ebbero posto fine alla battaglia, facemmo la fricardella per risvegliar il gusto a quei benedetti Signori, i quali ci pagarono con generosita. In più volte simili guadagnai con loro sessanta mila scudi; e due altre volte tanto, con colloro che mi proccurava la Cortigiana. Mi ricordo di uno che visitava mi spesso, e che sborrava sempre due volte senza cavarlo; e d'un altro il quale usciva da me pian piano, per entrare sotilmente nel mio vicino; e per questo bastava fare sù e giù le natiche. Ecco una uzanza curiosa che si prattica in Italia."

Cypria's Toy continued her history; in a strain half Congese and half Spanish. In all probability it was not a sufficient master of the latter language, to employ it alone. "A language is not learnt," says the African author, who would sooner hang himself, than miss a common observation, "without talking it much:" and Cypria's Toy had little or no time to talk at Madrid.

"I fled from Italy," said the Toy, "notwithstanding some secret desires that called me back, influxo malo del clima! y tuve luego la resolucion de ir me a una tierra donde pudiesse gozar mis fueros, sin partir los con un usurpador. I travelled into old Castille, where I was brought back to my simple functions: but this did not gratify my revenge. Le impuse la tarea de batter el compas en los bayles che celebrava de dia y de noche; and he performed so well, that we were reconciled. We appear'd at the court of Madrid as good friends. Al entrar de la ciudad, I link'd con un Pape venerable por sus canas: happily for me: for he had compassion for my

youth, and gave me a secret, the fruit of sixty years experience, para guardar me del mal de que merecieron los Franceses ser padrinos, por haver sido sus primeros pregones. With this receipt, and a relish for cleanliness, which I vainly endeavoured to introduce in Spain, I preserved myself from all accidents at Madrid, where my vanity alone was mortified. My mistress, you know, has a very little foot. Esta prenda es el incentivo mas poderoso de una imaginacion Castellana. A little foot, serves for a pasport at Madrid to a girl, que tiene la mas dilatada fima entre las piernas. I resolved to quit a country, where I owed the greatest part of my triumphs to a foreign merit; y me arrime a un definidor muy virtuoso que passava a las Indias. Under the wings of his reverence I saw the land of promise, that country where the happy mortal without scandal carries gold in his purse, a ponyard under his girdle, and his mistress behind him. How delightful a life is spent there! What nights! Gods, what nights! Hay de mi! al recordarme de tantos gustos me méo —— Algo mas —— Ya, ya — Pierdo il sentido —— Me muero ——

“After spending a year at Madrid, and in America, I embarked for Constantinople. There I could not relish the customs of a people, by whom Toys are lock’d up; and I soon quitted a country, in which my liberty was in danger. However, I practised sufficiently with the Mussulmans, to perceive that they are much improved by their commerce with the Europeans: and I found in them the levity of the French, the ardor of the English, the strength of the Germans, the longanimity of the Spaniards, together with strong tinctures of the Italian refinements: in a word, a single Aga is worth a cardinal, four dukes, a lord, three grandees of Spain, and two German princes.

“From Constantinople I came, as you know, gentlemen, to the court of the great Erguebzed, where I formed the most amiable of our nobility: and when at length I became good for nought, I threw myself on that odd figure

there," says the Toy, singling out Cypria's husband by a certain familiar gesture. "Gods, what a fall!"

The African author closes this chapter with an advertisement to the ladies, who might be tempted to order a translation of those parts of the the narrative, where Cypria's Toy expressed itself in foreign languages. "I should be wanting," says he, "to the duty of an historian, by suppressing them; and to the respect which I bear the sex, by preserving them in my work; without acquainting virtuous ladies, that Cypria's Toy had excessively spoil'd its speech in travelling, and that its narratives are infinitely more free than any of the clandestine lectures which it ever made."

CHAP. XLV. Cydalisa.

MANGOGUL RETURNED TO the favorite, where Selim was come before him. “Well, prince,” said Mirzoza, “has the account of Cypria’s travels done you any good?” “Neither good nor harm,” answered the Sultan: “I understood it not.” “Why so?” replied the favorite. “Because,” says the Sultan, “her Toy speaks like a Polyglot, all languages but mine. It is an impertinent Story-teller, but would make a excellent interpreter.” “What!” replied Mirzoza, “did you gather nothing at all from her narrative?” “But one thing, madam,” answered Mangogul, “and that is, that travelling is more pernicious, if possible, to the modesty of the women, than to the religion of the men; and that there is very little merit in knowing many languages. For one may be master of Greek, Latin, Italian, French, Spanish, and the language of Congo, and yet have no more sense than a Toy. Is this your opinion, madam? and what is Selim’s? Now let him begin his story: but above all, no more travels. They fatigue me to death.” Selim promised the Sultan, that the scene should be confined to one place, and spoke thus.

“I was about thirty years of age when I lost my father: I married to keep up my family, and I lived with my wife as becomes a husband; regards, attentions, politeness, decent behavior without much familiarity. The prince Erguebzed came to the throne: I had been in his good graces long before his reign: he continued me in them to his death, and I endeavour’d to do justice to this mark of distinction by my zeal and fidelity. The place of inspector general of his armies became vacant: I obtained it, and this post obliged me to take frequent journies to the frontiers.”

“Frequent journies?” cried the Sultan. “A single one is sufficient to make me sleep till to morrow. Think of that.”

“Prince,” continued Selim, “it was in one of these tours that I became acquainted with the wife of a colonel of the Spahi’s, whose name was Ostaluk, a man of bravery, and a good officer, but by no means an agreeable husband, jealous as a tyger, and his person was a sufficient warrant to justify that madness: for he was horribly ugly.

“He had lately espoused Cydalisa, young, lively, handsome; one of those uncommon women, for whom, at the first interview, one feels somewhat more than politeness, from whom one parts with regret, and who return a hundred times to your thoughts, till you see them again.

“Cydalisa had a just way of thinking, expressed herself with grace: her conversation was engaging, and if a person was never tired of seeing her, he was still less so of hearing her. With these qualities she had a right to make strong impressions on every heart, and I felt their effects. I esteemed her much; from esteem I soon ran into tenderness, and all my proceedings immediately assumed the true colour of a strong passion. The ease with which I obtained my former triumphs, had somewhat spoiled me: when I attacked Cydalisa, I imagined she would not hold out long; and that being very much honoured by the pursuit of Mr. Inspector General, she would only make a decent defence. Judge then at the surprise I was thrown into by the answer which she made to my declaration. ‘My lord,’ said she, ‘altho’ I had the presumption to believe that you are touched with some charms, which I am thought to have; yet I should be a fool to listen seriously to those same discourses with which you have deceived thousands, before you addressed them to me. Without esteem, what is love? A trifle, and you do not know me sufficiently to esteem me. Whatever judgment and penetration a person may have, he cannot in two days time enter deep enough into the character of a woman, to say that she deserves to be adored. Mr. Inspector General seeks an amusement; he is in the right; and so is Cydalisa too, in amusing no body.’

“In vain did I swear to the sincerity of my passion, that my happiness was in her hands, and that her indifference would poison the rest of my life. ‘Jargon,’ said she, ‘pure jargon. Either think no more of me, or do not believe me stupid enough to be catch’d by those trite protestations. What you have just said to me, every body says without thinking of it, and every body hears without believing it.’

“If I had had but a bare liking to Cydalisa, her severity would have mortified me: but as I loved her, it afflicted me. I set out for the court: her image followed me thither; and absence, far from weakening the passion which I had conceived for her, did but augment it.

“Cydalisa had so far taken possession of me, that I thought a hundred times to make a sacrifice to her of the employments and rank which bound me to the court: but the uncertainty of success always withheld me.

“In the impossibility of flying to the place where I left her, I formed a project to bring her where I was. I took advantage of the confidence with which Erguebzed honoured me, by extolling the merit and valor of Ostaluk. He was named lieutenant of the Spahi’s of his guard, an office which fixed him near the prince; and Ostaluk appeared at court, and with him Cydalisa, who instantly became the beauty of the day.”

“You did well,” says the Sultan, “to keep your employments, and call your Cydalisa to court: for I swear to you by Brama, that I should have suffered you to set out alone for the province she was in.”

“She was ogled, surveyed, beset, but all in vain,” continued Selim. “I enjoyed the sole privilege of seeing her every day. The more I visited her, the more graces and good qualities I perceived in her, and the more desperately I became enamoured. I fancied that possibly the remembrance of my numerous adventures might injure me in her mind; in order to efface it, and convince her of the sincerity of my love, I banished myself from company, and I saw no women but those which chance threw in my way at

her house. It seemed to me as if this conduct had some effect on her, and that she relaxed somewhat of her former severity. I doubled my diligence, I asked for love, and she granted me esteem. Cydalisa began to treat me with distinction. I had some share in her confidence: she often consulted me on her family affairs, but was quite silent on those of her heart. If I expressed myself in tender sentiments, she answered me in maxims, which made me mad. This painful state had lasted a long time, when I took up the resolution to get out of it, and to know positively once for all, what I might depend on." "How did you set about it?" said Mirzoza. "Madam, you will soon be informed," answered Mangogul: and Selim continued.

"I have told you, madam, that I saw Cydalisa every day: I began by seeing her less frequently, I went on by slackening my visits more and more, till infine I scarce saw her at all. Whenever I happened to converse with her *tête à tête*, I spoke as little of love as if I had never felt the least spark of it. This change astonished her: she suspected me of some secret engagement, and one day, as I was making her a narrative of the galantries of the court, 'Selim,' said she to me with an air of confusion, 'you tell me nothing concerning yourself: you relate the good fortune of others charmingly, but you are very discreet with regard to your own.' 'Madam,' answered I, ''tis probably because I have none, or that I think it is proper to conceal it.' 'To be true,' interrupted she, ''tis of vast consequence to conceal those things to day, which all the world will know to morrow.' 'Be that as it will, madam,' replied I, 'yet at least nobody shall have them from me.' 'Indeed,' said she, 'you are quite marvellous with your reserves; but pray who does not know that you have designs upon the fair Misis, the little Zibelina, and the nut-brown Sephera?' 'And on whom you please besides, madam,' added I coldly. 'Truly,' replied she, 'I can easily believe that these are not all: these two months past, that the sight of you is a favour, you have not been idle, and business goes on fast with those ladies.' 'I, to remain

idle,' answered I; 'I should never forgive myself. My heart is made to love, and somewhat to be beloved too; and I will go so far as to own that it is: but ask me no farther questions on this head, perhaps I have already said too much.'

"'Selim,' replied she seriously, 'I have no secret for you, and you shall have none for me, if you please. How far are you advanced?' — — 'Almost to the end of the novel' — — 'And with whom?' said she earnestly — — 'You know Marteza'— 'Yes, sure; she is a very amiable woman.' 'Well then, after having in vain tried all means to please you, I turned to that side. I was wished for above half a year; two interviews levell'd the outworks, a third will compleat my happiness; and this very night Marteza expects me to supper. Her conversation is amusing, light, and a little caustic; but, that excepted, she is the best creature in the world. A person transacts his little affairs better with those giggling women, than with those lofty dames, who.' — — 'But, my Lord,' interrupted Cydalisa with a down-cast look, 'in complimenting you on your choice, may one observe to you, that Marteza is not new, and that before you, she has reckoned lovers?' — — 'What is that to me, madam?' replied I. 'If Marteza loves me sincerely, I look on myself as her first. But the hour of my appointment draws near, permit me.' — — 'One word more, my Lord. Is it really true that Marteza loves you? — — 'I believe it.' — — 'And you love her?' added Cydalisa. — — 'Madam,' answered I, ''tis you that have thrown me into the arms of Marteza: I need say no more to you.' —— I was departing, but Cydalisa pull'd me by my Doliman, and turned back in a hurry. — — 'Does madam want to speak with me? Has she any commands for me?' — — 'No, Sir, how, are you there still? I thought you were a good way off by this time.' — — 'Madam, I will double my pace.' — — 'Selim' — — 'Cydalisa.' — — 'Then you are going?' — — 'Yes, madam.' — — 'Ah! Selim, to whom do you sacrifice me? Was not Cydalisa's esteem of greater value than the favors of

a Marteza?' — — 'Without doubt, madam,' replied I, 'if I had nothing more than esteem for you. But I loved you.' — — 'It is not so,' cried she with transport: 'if you had loved me, you would have distinguished my real sentiments; you would have been prepossessed with them, you would have flattered yourself, that your perseverance would in time get the better of my pride: but you grew tired, you have abandoned me, and perhaps in the very moment' —— At this word Cydalisa stopt short, a sigh slipt from her, and her eyes were wet.— 'Speak, madam,' said I, 'make an end. If my tenderness lasted still, notwithstanding your rigorous treatment, could you.' — — 'I can do nothing, you do no longer love me, and Marteza waits for you.' — — 'If Marteza was indifferent to me; if Cydalisa was dearer to me than ever, what would you do?'— 'It would be folly to explain myself on suppositions.' — — 'Cydalisa, I beseech you to answer me, as if I had supposed nothing. If Cydalisa was constantly the most lovely of her sex in my eyes; and if I never had the least design on Marteza; once again what would you do?' — — 'What I have always done, ingrateful man,' answered at length Cydalisa: 'I would love you.'— 'And Selim adores you,' said I, falling on my knees, and kissing her hands which I water'd with my tears. Cydalisa was struck dumb, this unexpected change threw her into the utmost confusion: I took advantage of her disorder, and our reconciliation was sealed by certain marks of tenderness, which she had not power to refuse."

"And what did the good natured Ostaluk say to this?" interrupted Mangogul. "Doubtless he allowed his dear half to be generous to a man, to whom he was indebted for his lieutenancy of the Spahi's."

"Prince," replied Selim, "Ostaluk shewed great gratitude, whilst I was not listened to; but no sooner was I made happy, but he became troublesome, ill-humour'd, insupportable to me, and brutal to his wife. Not content with disturbing us in person, he caused us to be watched, we were

betrayed, and Ostaluk, convinced of his pretended dishonour, had the impudence to challenge me to a duel. We fought in the great park of the Seraglio: I gave him two wounds, and obliged him to own himself indebted to me for his life.

"While he was under cure of his wounds, I never quitted his wife: but the first use that he made of his recovery, was to part us and ill-use Cydalisa. She sent me a pathetic account of her unhappy situation: I proposed carrying her off, to which she consented, and our jealous pate, returning from the chase, wherein he attended the Sultan, was vastly surprized to find himself a widower. Ostaluk, instead of giving vent to his passion in useless complaints against the author of the rape, instantly meditated revenge.

"I had Cydalisa in a country house, two leagues from Banza; and every other night I stole out of town, and went to Cisara. Mean while Ostaluk set a price on the head of his false one, bribed my servants, and was let into my park. That evening I was enjoying the refreshing breeze there with Cydalisa; we were got to the remoter end of a dark walk, and I was on the point of lavishing the most tender caresses on her, when an invisible hand pierced her breast with a ponyard before my eyes. It was the hand of cruel Ostaluk. The same fate hung over my head: but I prevented Ostaluk, I drew my dagger, and Cydalisa was revenged. I ran to the dear woman: her heart still panted: I hastened to carry her to the house, but before I reached it she expired, her mouth closely pressing on mine.

"When I perceived Cydalisa's limbs to grow stiff in my arms, I cryed out with vehemence: my people ran to me, and forced me away from this place of horror. I returned to Banza, and shut myself up in my palace, excessively grieved at Cydalisa's death, and loading myself with the most cruel reproaches. I loved Cydalisa sincerely, and was passionately beloved by her; and I was at full leisure to consider the greatness of the loss, which I had sustained, and to mourn for her."

“But at length,” said the favorite, “you comforted your self?” “Alas! madam,” replied Selim, “I thought I never should; but this one thing I have learnt by it, that there is no grief eternal.”

“Well,” said Mirzoza, “let me hear no more of the men: there they are all. That is to say, Signor Selim, that this poor Cydalisa, whose history has moved us to compassion, and whom you have so much regretted, was a great fool to rely on your oath; and that, while Brama perhaps chastises her severely for her credulity, you pass your time pleasantly enough in the arms of another.”

“Pray, madam,” replied the Sultan, “calm your self: Selim loves again, Cydalisa will be revenged.” “Sir,” answered Selim, “your highness may possibly be misinformed. Ought I not to have learnt, once for my whole life, by my adventure with Cydalisa, that true love was too prejudicial to happiness?”— “Without doubt,” interrupted Mirzoza, “and yet I would lay a wager, notwithstanding your philosophical reflections, that you actually love another more ardently than—”

“More ardently,” replied Selim, “I dare not assert: these five years past I am attached, but attached from my heart to a charming woman. It was not without difficulty, that I made her listen to me, for she had always been of a virtue!”— “Virtue!” cried the Sultan; “courage, my friend, I am charmed, when one talks to me of the virtue of a court lady.” “Selim,” said the favorite, “continue your story:” “and always believe, as a good mussulman, in the fidelity of your mistress,” added the Sultan. “Ah! prince,” replied Selim with vivacity, “Fulvia is faithful to me:” “faithful, or not,” answered Mangogul, “what is that to your happiness? You believe it, and that is sufficient?” “Oh then! ’tis Fulvia that you are now in love with,” said the favorite. “Yes, madam,” answered Selim. “So much the worse, my friend,” added Mangogul: “I have not a grain of faith in her. She is perpetually beset by Bramins, and these Bramins are terrible fellows: besides, I find she has

little Chinese eyes, with a turn'd up nose; and an air thoroughly inclining to the side of pleasure. Between us, is this true?" "Prince," answered Selim, "I believe she has no aversion to it." "Well," replied the Sultan, "every thing gives way to that charm: which you ought to know better than I, or you are not"— "You are mistaken," replied the favorite, "a man may have all the sense in the world, and not know that. I wager"— "Always wagers," interrupted Mangogul: "I am out of all patience; those women are incorrigible. Pray, madam, win your castle, and lay wagers afterward."

"Madam," says Selim to the favorite, "might not Fulvia be of use to you in some station or other?" "As how?" ask'd Mirzoza. "I have observed," answered the courtier, "that the Toys have seldom or never spoke, but in presence of his highness; and I have fancied, that the Genius Cucufa, who has done so many surprising things in favour of Kanaglou the Sultan's grand-father, might have endowed his grand-son with the gift of making them speak. But Fulvia's Toy has not as yet opened its mouth, as far as I could ever learn: might it not be possible to interrogate it, in order to procure you the castle, and to convince me of the fidelity of my mistress?" "Doubtless," replied the Sultan; "what is your opinion, madam?" "Oh! I shall not meddle in so ticklish an affair. Selim is too much my friend, to expose him, for the sake of a castle; to the risque of being made unhappy the rest of his days." "But you do not consider," replied the Sultan: "Fulvia is virtuous: Selim would run his hand into the fire to prove it. He has said it, and he is not a man to flinch from his word." "No, Prince," answered Selim, "and if your highness will give me a meeting at Fulvia's house, I will certainly be there before you." "Be cautious of what you propose," replied the favorite. "Selim, my poor Selim, you go very fast, and how worthy soever you are of being beloved"— "Fear not, madam; since the dye is cast, I will hear Fulvia: the worst that can befal me, is to lose a faithless woman." "And to die of regret," added the Sultana, "for having lost her." "What a

romance," says Mangogul. "You believe then that Selim is become very weak. He has lost the lovely Cydalisa, and yet there he is full of life; and you pretend, that if he happened to find Fulvia unfaithful to him, it would kill him. I'll insure him to you as immortal, if he is never demolished but by that stroke. Selim, to morrow at Fulvia's, do you hear? you will have notice of the hour." Selim bow'd, Mangogul quitted the company: the favorite continued to remonstrate to the old courtier, that he play'd a high game. Selim thank'd her for her tokens of good will, and each retired in expectation of the great event.

CHAP. XLVI. Twenty-seventh Trial of the Ring.

Fulvia.



THE AFRICAN AUTHOR, who had promised to bring Selim's character into some part of his book, has thought fit to place it here: and I have too much esteem for the works of antiquity, to assert that it would come in better some where else. "There are," says he, "some men, whose merit gives them access every where, who by their graceful person, and free easy wit, are in their youth the darlings of many women; and whose gray hairs are respected, because having known how to reconcile their duties with their pleasures, they have rendered their middle stage of life illustrious, by services done for the state: in a word, men, who at all times are the delight of society. Such was Selim. Though he had reached sixty years, and that he had entered the list of pleasure early; a strong constitution and some management had preserved him from the infirmities of age. A noble air, an easy carriage, insinuating language, a great knowledge of the world, founded on long experience, the habit of dealing with the sex, made him to be regarded at court, as a man whom every body would chuse to resemble, but who would be unsuccessfully copied, for want of being endowed by nature with the talents and genius which had distinguished him.

"Now I desire to know," continues the African author, "if this man had reason to make himself uneasy on the score of a mistress, and to spend the night like a mad man? For the fact is, that a thousand reflexions rolled in his head; and the more he loved Fulvia, the more he feared to find her unfaithful. 'Into what labyrinth have I thrust my self?' said he to himself. 'And to what purpose? What advantage will accrue to me, in case the favorite should win a castle; and what will be my fate, if she loses it? But

why should she lose it? Am I not certain of Fulvia's love? Ah! I am in the sole and entire possession of her; and if her Toy speak, it will be of me alone. — But if the treacherous — no, no, I should have had some previous notion of it; I should have observed some unevenness in her temper. Some time or other, these five years past, she would have betrayed herself. — Yet the trial is dangerous. —— But it is now no longer time to recoil, I have lifted the vessel to my mouth, I must finish, tho' I were to spill the liquor. —— Perhaps also the oracle will be in my favour. — Alas! what can I expect from it? Why must others have failed in their attacks on that virtue, over which I have triumphed? —— Ah! dear Fulvia, I wrong thee by my suspicions, and I forget what it cost me to conquer thee. A ray of hope enlightens me, and I flatter myself that thy Toy will obstinately keep silence. — —'"

Selim was in this agitation of mind, when he received a card from the Sultan, which contained these words: *This night, precisely at half an hour after eleven, you will be where you know.* Selim took his pen, and answered with a trembling hand: *Prince, I will obey.*

Selim passed the rest of the day, as he had done the preceding night, fluctuating between hope and fear. Nothing is truer, than that lovers have an instinct: if their mistress be unfaithful, they are seized with an horror much like to that, which animals feel at the approach of bad weather. The suspicious lover is a cat, whose ear itches in cloudy weather. Animals and lovers have this property also in common, that domestic animals lose this instinct, and that it grows dull in lovers, when they are converted into husbands.

The hours seemed very tedious to Selim, he look'd a hundred times on his watch: infine the fatal moment came, and the courtier went to visit his mistress. It was late, but as he had admission at all hours, Fulvia's appartment was opened for him — — "I had given you over," said she,

“and I went to bed with a swimming in my head, which I owe to the impatience you have thrown me into” — — “Madam,” answered Selim, “business and respect have detained me with the Sultan; and since I parted from you, I have not been master of myself one moment.” “And for my part,” replied Fulvia, “I have been in a dreadful humour. How! two whole days without seeing you.”— “You know,” answered Selim, “what my rank obliges me to: and let the favour of the great appear ever so fixed” — — “How,” interrupted Fulvia, “has the Sultan shewn you any coldness? Has he forgot your services? Selim, you are pensive, you do not answer me. —— Alas! if you love me, of what avail is the prince’s good or bad reception to your happiness. It is not in his eyes, it is in mine, ’tis in my arms that you are to seek it.”

Selim listened attentively to this discourse, examined the countenance of his mistress, and in its motions sought that character of truth, in which a person is not deceived, and which is impossible to counterfeit well: when I say impossible, I mean to us men: for Fulvia was so perfectly composed, that Selim began to blame himself for having suspected her, when Mangogul entered the room. Fulvia was silent in an instant, Selim trembled; and the Toy said: “In vain does my lady make pilgrimages to all the Pagoda’s of Congo, she will have no children; for reasons well known to me, who am her Toy. — —”

At this declaration a deadly paleness seized Selim: he attempted to rise, but his trembling knees failed him, and he fell back into his seat. The invisible Sultan step’d up to him, and whispered in his ear: “Have you enough?” “Alas! Prince,” replied the melancholic Selim, “why did I not follow the advice of Mirzoza; and the misgivings of my own heart? My happiness is eclipsed, I am a lost man: I die, if her Toy does not speak; if it does, I am a dead man: let it speak out however. I expect frightful

intelligences; but I fear them less than I hate the state of perplexity, in which I am. — —”

In the mean time Fulvia’s first motion was to put her hand on her Toy, and to shut its mouth: what it had hitherto said, might bear a favorable interpretation: but she dreaded the sequel. As she began to take courage on account of its remaining silent, the Sultan, urged by Selim, turned his ring: Fulvia was obliged to spread her fingers, and the Toy went on.

“I will never hold, I am too much harassed. The too assiduous visits of so many holy men will always obstruct my intentions, and madam will not have any children. If I had been regaled by none but Selim, I might possibly prove fruitful: but I lead the life of a gally-slave. This day fatigued by one, to morrow by another; and always at the oar. The last man which Fulvia sees, is always the person, whom she believes destined by heaven to perpetuate her race. None can be safe from this fancy. O how tiresome is the condition of the Toy of a titled lady, who has no heirs! These ten years past, I am exposed to people, who were not made even to lift their eyes up to me.”

Here Mangogul was of opinion that Selim had heard enough, to cure him of his perplexity: wherefore he exempted him from the remaining part, turned off his ring, and went away, abandoning Fulvia to the reproaches of her lover.

At first the miserable Selim was petrified: but his fury giving him strength and speech, he darted a scornful look on his unfaithful mistress, and said: “Ingrateful, perfidious woman, if I loved you still, I would take revenge: but as you are unworthy of my affection, so you are likewise of my wrath. A man like me, Selim to be mixed with a pack of scoundrels. — —”

“Truly,” interrupted Fulvia smartly, in the strain of an unmasked courtisan, “it much becomes you to give yourself airs for a trifle: instead of thanking me for concealing matters from you, which would have made you

mad at the time of their transacting; you take fire, you fly into a rage, as if you had been injured. And pray, Sir, what reason can you have for preferring yourself to Rickel, to Seton, to Mollio, to Tachmas, to the most amiable cavaliers of the court, from whom their mistresses won't be at the pains even of cloaking the slips they make. Consider, Selim, that you are exhausted, infirm, and long incapable of engrossing a pretty woman, who is not a fool. Acknowledge then, that your presumption is ill-timed, and your rage impertinent. Infine you may, if you are dissatisfied, leave the field open to others, who will make better use of it." "So I do, and most heartily," replied Selim with excessive indignation: and went away, fully resolved never more to see that woman.

He went home, and shut himself up for some days, less grieved for his loss, than for his long error. Not his heart, but his vanity suffered. He dreaded the reproches of the favorite, and the jokes of the Sultan; and he shun'd the one and the other.

He was upon the point of resolving to renounce the court, to go into retirement, and turn philosopher for the remaining part of a life, of which he had thrown away a great part in quality of a courtier; when Mirzoza, who guess'd his thoughts, undertook to comfort him, sent for him to the Seraglio, and made him this speech. "Well, my poor Selim, then you abandon me? 'Tis not Fulvia, it is me that you punish for her infidelity. We are all concerned for your adventure, we agree that it is vexatious: but if you set any value on the Sultan's protection and my esteem, you will continue to enliven our company, and you will forget that Fulvia, who never was worthy of a man like you."

"Madam," answered Selim, "age admonishes me that it is high time for me to retire. I have sufficiently seen the world; and four days ago I would have boasted that I knew it. But Fulvia's stroak confounds me. Women are indefinable, and I should hate them all, if you had not been included in the

sex, of which you have all the charms. May Brama grant, that you never imbibe their perverseness. Farewell, madam, I am going to give myself up to useful reflections in solitude. The remembrance of the favours, with which you and the Sultan have honoured me, will follow me thither; and if my heart forms any vows henceforth, they will be for your happiness and his glory."

"Selim," replied the favorite, "your chagrine is your adviser. You are afraid of mockery, which you will less avoid by withdrawing from court, than by remaining at it. Have as much philosophy as you will, this is not the time to put it in practice; your retreat will be attributed to peevishness and melancholy. You are not framed to confine yourself in a desert; and the Sultan — —"

Mangogul's arrival interrupted the favorite: she informed him of Selim's design. "Then he is turn'd fool," says the prince; "is it possible that the base usage of that little Fulvia has turn'd his head." And then addressing himself to Selim — — "That shall not be, my friend, you shall stay," continues he: "I want your counsel, and madam your company. The welfare of my empire, and Mirzoza's satisfaction require it, and it shall be."

Selim, moved with the sentiments of Mangogul and the favorite, bowed respectuously, staid at court, was loved, cherished, sought for, and distinguished by his favour with the Sultan and Mirzoza.



“During the reign of Mangogul’s grand-father Kanaglou the women start walking on their hands and tumbling, fulfilling the prediction of a fairy.”

CHAP. XLVII. Prodigious events of the Reign of Kanaglou, Mangogul's Grand-father.



THE FAVORITE WAS very young. Born towards the end of Erguebzed's reign, she had scarce any idea at all of the court of Kanaglou. A word accidentally dropt had given her a curiosity to know the prodigies, which the genius Cucufa had wrought in favour of that good prince; and none could more faithfully inform her than Selim. He had been an eye-witness and even a sharer in them, and was throughly versed in the history of his time. One day that he was alone with her, Mirzoza put him on that topic, and asked him if the reign of Kanaglou, which made so great noise, had seen greater wonders, than those, which then engrossed the attention of Congo?

"I have no interest, madam," answered Selim, "in preferring times past to those of the reigning prince. Great things are come to pass under him, but they are perhaps no more than specimens of those which will continue to render Mangogul illustrious; and my time is too far advanced, to flatter my self with seeing them." "You are mistaken," replied Mirzoza; "you have acquired, and will keep the epithet of eternal. But tell me what you have seen."

"Madam," continued Selim, "Kanaglou's reign was long, and our poets have named it the golden age. This title suits it upon several accounts. It has been signalized by successes and victories: but the advantages were blended with crosses, which prove that this gold was sometimes mixed with bad alloy. The court, which sets the example to the rest of the empire, was very gallant. The Sultan had mistresses, the nobility piqued themselves on imitating him, and the lower people insensibly assumed the same air. The magnificence in dress, furniture, and equipages, was excessive. Delicacy in

feasting was reduced to an art. People gam'd high, ran in debt, paid no body, and spent while they had either money or credit. There were very good laws enacted against luxury, but not put in execution. Towns were taken, provinces conquered, palaces begun, and the empire drained of men and money. The people sung victory, and were starving at the same time. The great had stately castles and delightful gardens, and their lands lay uncultivated. A hundred ships of war had rendered us masters of the sea, and the terror of our neighbours: but a good calculator made an exact estimate what it cost the government to keep these hulks in good order; and notwithstanding the remonstrances of the rest of the ministry, they were ordered to be turned into a bon-fire. The royal treasury was a great empty coffer, which this wretched oeconomy did not fill; gold and silver became so scarce, that the mints were, on a summer's morning, converted into paper-mills. To compleat our happiness, Kanaglou suffered himself to be persuaded by a set of fanatics, that it was of the utmost importance, that all his subjects should resemble him, and that they should have blue eyes, snub noses, and red whiskers, as well as he: and he expelled from Congo above two millions of people, who were not blessed with these regimentals, or who refused to counterfeit them. Such, madam, was this golden age; such those good old times, which you daily hear regretted: but let those dotards prate on, and do you believe that we have our Turennes and our Colberts, that, all things considered, the present is better than the time past; and that if the people are happier under Mangogul than they were under Kanaglou, his highness's reign is more illustrious than that of his grandfather, because the happiness of the subject is the exact measure of the greatness of the prince. But let us return to the particulars of Kanaglou's reign.

"I will begin by the origin of the Pantins." "Selim, I will excuse you, I know that story by heart," says the favorite, "proceed to other matters." "Madam," answered Selim, "might one ask from whom you have it?"

“Why,” says Mirzoza, “it is published.” “True Madam,” replied Selim, “and by people, who knew nothing of the matter. I am out of humour, when I see little obscure private persons, who have never been near princes, but at a public entry into the metropolis, or some such other ceremony, pretend to write their history.

“Madam,” continued Selim, “we had spent the night at a masquerade in the great salons in the Seraglio, when the genius Cucufa, a vowed protector of the reigning family, appeared to us, and commanded us to go to bed, and sleep twenty four hours on a stretch. He was obeyed, and at the expiration of this term, the Seraglio was found to be transformed into a vast and magnificent galery of Pantins. At one end appeared Kanaglou seated on his throne: a long pack-thread, almost worn out, hung down between his legs: an old decrepit fairy was incessantly pulling it, and with a turn of her wrist, moved an innumerable multitude of subaltern Pantins, to whom fine imperceptible threads answered, which issued from Kanaglou’s fingers and toes. She pulled, and in an instant the seneschal drew up, and sealed ruinous edicts; or pronounced a panegyric on the fairy, which was prompted by his secretary: the minister of war sent card matches to the army; the superintendant of the finances built houses, and suffered the soldiery to starve; and so of the other Pantins.

“When any of the Pantins happened to execute their movements aukwardly, by not lifting up their arms sufficiently, or not bowing their knee in a proper manner, the fairy cut their threads with a jerk of her left hand, and they became paralytic. I shall never forget two most valiant emirs, whom she found deficient in their duty, and who were ever after deprived of the use of their arms.

“The threads which issued from every part of Kanaglou’s body, were extended to immense distances, and from the palace of Congo, put whole armies of Pantins into motion or winter quarters, even to the remotest parts

of Monoémugi. With one pull of the pack-thread, a town was besieged, the trenches were opened, they battered in breach, and the enemy was preparing to capitulate; but upon a second pull, the besiegers fire slackened, the attacks were not carried on with the same vigour, troops came to the relief of the place, dissentions were kindled among the generals: we were attacked, surprized, beaten, and routed.

“These bad tidings never gave any concern to Kanaglou: he seldom heard them, till they were forgot by his subjects: and the fairy would not suffer him to be informed of them, but by Pantins, who had each a thread fastned to the tip of their tongue, and who said no more than what she thought proper, on pain of being struck dumb.

“Another time we young fools were all charmed with an adventure, which gave bitter scandal to the godly. The women all at once became tumblers, and fell to walking with their heads down, their legs up in air, and their hands in their slippers.

“This threw all our former knowledge into confusion; and we were obliged to commence a course of studies on these new physiognomies. Many were slighted, who ceased to be thought lovely, as soon as they shewed themselves; and others, who were never so much as talked of, gained vastly by making themselves known. Their petticoats and gowns falling over their eyes, put them in danger, either of losing their way, or stumbling: wherefore the former were shortened, and the latter cut open before. Such is the origin of short petticoats and open gowns. When the women returned to the use of their feet, they retained this part of their dress as it was: and if we thoroughly consider the petticoats of our fine ladies, we shall easily perceive, that they were not made to be worn, as they are worn at this day.

“Any mode, that has but one drift, will soon pass away: in order to make it lasting, it ought to answer two ends at least. In those same days a secret

was discovered for plumping the breasts downward: and it is used at this day for plumping them upward.

“The devout women, surprized to find their heads down, and their heels up in the air, at first covered themselves with their hands: but this attention made them lose their poise, and stumble in their walks. By the advice of the Bramins, they afterwards tied their petticoats about their legs with little black ribbons. The gay part of the sex found this expedient ridiculous, and publickly declared, that it incommoded their respiration, and threw them into the vapours. This prodigy was attended with happy consequences; it occasioned a number of marriages, or somewhat like them, and a crowd of conversions. All those, who had disagreeable buttocks, ran headlong into the religious party, and took little black ribbons. Four missions of Bramins would not have made so many proselytes.

“We had scarcely got rid of this trial, when we underwent another, less universal indeed, but not less instructive. The young girls, one and all, from thirteen to eighteen, nineteen, twenty years of age, and upwards, rose on a fine summer’s morning, the middle finger caught, guess where, madam?” says Selim to the favorite. “It was not in their mouth, nor in their ear, nor infine, *à la Turque*. Their disease was easily guess’d, and the remedy quickly applied. From that time may our custom be dated of marrying children, who are fit for nothing but dressing their dolls.

“Another blessing: Kanaglou’s court swarmed with *Petits-maitres*, and I had the honour to be of the number. One day as I was entertaining them with the young French nobility, I perceived our shoulders working upwards, till they became higher than our heads: but that was not all; in an instant we all fell to whirling about on one heel.” “And what rarity was there in that?” said the favorite. “Nothing, madam,” replied Selim, “but that the first metamorphosis is the origin of the round shoulders, so much in vogue in your infancy; and the second, that of the scoffers, whose reign is not yet

over. Then, as now, a discourse was begun to some one person, which by a sudden twirl on the heel, was continued to a second, and finished to a third, to whom it became half unintelligible, half impertinent.

“Another time we all found our selves short sighted, and were forced to have recourse to Bion: the rogue made us pay ten sequins for glasses, which we continued to use, even after recovering our sight. Thence come, madam, the opera spy glasses.

“I could never learn what the fine ladies did to the Genius Cucufa about this time; but he took severe vengeance of them. At the end of a certain year, whereof they had spent the nights in balls, banquets, and gaming, and the days in dressing, or between the arms of their lovers, they were all astonished to find themselves horridly ugly. One was as black as a mole, another bronzed over; a third pale and lean, a fourth of a sickly yellow, and full of wrinkles. There was a necessity to palliate this fatal enchantment, and our chemists found out the white, the red, pomatums, waters, venus’s handkerchiefs, virgins milk, patches, and a thousand other cosmetics, which they employed, to avoid appearing ugly, and becoming frightful. Cucufa still held them under this curse, when Erguebzed, who loved beautiful women, became their intercessor. The Genius did all that he could; but the charm was so powerful, that he was not able to dissolve it thoroughly; and the court ladies remained such as you see them at this day.”

“Was the fate of the other charms the same?” says Mirzoza. “No, madam,” answered Selim, “they lasted some longer, some shorter: the round shoulders sunk by degrees, and people stood upright: and for fear of being thought hump-back’d, they turned up their noses to the wind, and danced as they walked. The whirlgig motion continued, and they whirl about to this day. Broach a serious or sensible conversation in presence of a young lord of the *bel air*; and *Zeste*, you shall see him wheel away from you in an instant, and go mutter out a parody to some body, who asks him the

news of the war, or of his health; or to whisper in his ear, that he supped last night with Miss Rabon, and that she is an adorable girl; that there is a new romance coming abroad; that he has read some pages of it, and that it is fine, very fine: and then another twirl or two towards a lady, whom he asks if she has seen the new opera, and answers her, that Miss Dangeville has performed to a miracle."

Mirzoza found these ridicules very diverting, and asked Selim if he had been a sharer in them. "How, madam," replied the old courtier, "was it possible not to have them, without passing for a man come from the other world? I put on the round shoulders, I stood erect, I danced in walking, I cock'd the spy-glass, I whirled about, I hissed like the rest: and the utmost efforts of my judgment went no farther than to be one of the first in taking up these several biasses, and none of the last in shaking them off." Selim was got thus far, when Mangogul appeared. The African author does not inform us, what was become of him, or what were his occupations during this preceding chapter. Probably the princes of Congo may be allowed to perform indifferent actions, to say miserable things sometimes, and to resemble the rest of mankind, who spend a great part of their lives in doing nothing, or such things at least, as are not worthy of being known.

CHAP. XLVIII. Twenty-eighth Trial of the Ring.

Olympia.



"REJOICE, MADAM," SAYS Mangogul, coming in to the favorite's appartment. "I bring you an agreeable piece of news. The Toys are a parcel of little fools, who know not what they say. Cucufa's ring can indeed make them speak, but not extort the truth from them." "And how has your highness caught them in a lye?" says the favorite. "You shall hear," answered the Sultan. "Selim promised you an account of all his adventures, and you make no doubt but that he has kept his word. Well then, I am just come from consulting a Toy, who accuses him of a naughty trick, which he has not confessed to you, and which most certainly he has not play'd, as it is quite contrary to his character. To tyrannize over a pretty woman, to lay her under contribution, on pain of military execution: can you discover Selim in this proceeding?" "Pray, why not, Sir?" replied the favorite. "There is no malice of this sort, of which Selim has not been capable: and if he has concealed the adventure which you have discovered, possibly it is, that he is reconciled to this Toy, that they are well together, and that he thought he might keep that peccadillo from me, without swerving from his promise."

"The perpetual falsity of your conjectures," replied Mangogul, "ought to cure you of the disease of ever making any. There is nothing of what you imagine in the affair: it is one of the first flights of Selim's youthful days. It regards one of those women, who are gained in a minute, but are never kept long."

"Madam," says Selim to the favorite, "in vain do I examine my self, I can recal nothing more to my memory; and at present I find my conscience quite clear."

“Olympia,” says Mangogul— “Ah! Prince,” interrupted Selim, “I know the thing; but this little story is so old, that it is no wonder that it has escaped me.”

“Olympia,” continued Mangogul, “wife of the chief cashier of Hasna, had coiffed herself with a young officer, captain in Selim’s regiment. Her lover came to her one morning in deep concern, to inform her that orders were issued for all the officers to set out and join their respective corps. My grandfather Kanaglou had resolved that year to open the campaign early: and an admirable project, which he had formed, miscarried, purely through the making these orders too publick. The politicians murmured, the women exclaimed, each party had their reasons. I have told you those of Olympia. This woman took the party of seeing Selim, and, if possible, to prevent the departure of Gabalis: for that was her lover’s name. Selim already passed for a dangerous man. Olympia thought it was proper to have an escort: and two of her female friends, as handsome as her self, offered to accompany her. Selim was at home when they came. He received Olympia, who appeared alone, with that easy politeness, which you know he is master of, and asked what had procured him this agreeable visit? ‘Sir,’ says Olympia, ‘I interest my self for Gabalis: he has some important affairs on his hands, which make his presence necessary at Banza, and I come to you to beg six months leave of absence for him.’

“‘Six months leave, Madam? You do not consider,’ replied Selim: ‘the Sultan’s orders are precise: I am heartily concerned, that I cannot make a merit towards you of a favour, which would infallibly ruin me.’ New instances on Olympia’s side: on Selim’s new refusals— ‘The Grand Vizir has promised me, that I should be comprehended in the next promotion. Can you desire me, madam, to drown my self, in order to oblige you?’ ‘No, Sir, you may oblige me, without drowning your self’— ‘Madam, it is impossible: but if you go to the Visir’— ‘Alas! Sir, to whom do you send

me, that man never did any thing for the ladies'— 'I rack my brain to no purpose: for I should be highly rejoiced in being able to render you service, and I can see but one way.' 'And which is that?' asked Olympia with eagerness.— 'Your intention,' answered Selim, 'would be to make Gabalis happy for six months: but, madam, could you not dispose of one quarter of an hour of those pleasures which you design for him?' Olympia understood him wonderfully well, blushed, stammered; and concluded by exclaiming at the severity of the condition. 'Let us say no more of the affair,' replied the colonel with a cold air, 'Gabalis shall join his regiment: the prince's service must be done. I might venture to take somewhat on my self: but you are inflexible. At least, madam, if Gabalis departs, it is you that send him away.' 'I,' cry'd Olympia sharply: 'Ah! Sir, make out his warrant quickly, and let him remain here.' The essential preliminaries of the treaty were ratified on a sopha, and the lady thought she had made sure of Gabalis; when the traitor, who stands before you, took it into his head to ask her, who those two ladies were, who came with her, and whom she left in the next appartment. 'They are two of my intimate friends,' replied Olympia; 'and of Gabalis too,' added Selim, 'beyond all doubt. This supposed, I do not believe they will refuse to execute each a third part of the articles of the treaty. Yes, this to me seems just: and to you, madam, I commit the care of disposing them to it.' 'Indeed, Sir,' says Olympia, 'you are a strange man. I protest, these ladies have no pretentions to Gabalis: but in order to extricate them and my self from this *embarras*, if you think me responsible, I will endeavour to discharge the bill of exchange, which you draw on them.' Selim accepted the offer. Olympia did honour to her word: and there, madam, is what Selim ought to have informed you of."

"I excuse him," says the favorite: "Olympia was not so good an acquaintance, that I should condemn him for having forgot her. I cannot

imagine whither you go to hunt out that sort of women: indeed, prince, your conduct is that of a man, who has no desire to lose a castle."

"Madam, to me it seems, as if you had entirely changed your notions within these few days," answered Mangogul: "do me the favour to recollect the first trial of my ring, which I proposed to you; and you will see, it was not my fault that I have not lost it ere now."

"Yes," replied the Sultana, "I know, you have sworn to me, that I should be excepted out of the number of speaking Toys; and that since that time you have applied to such women only as have forfeited their character; to an Amina, a Zobeida, a Thelis, a Zulica, whose reputations were already pretty well settled."

"I grant," says Mangogul, "that it would be ridiculous indeed to rely on those Toys: but for want of others, I was necessitated to confine myself to them. I have already told you, and I now repeat it: good company with respect to Toys is scarcer than you think; and if you will not resolve to gain yourself — —"

"I," interrupted Mirzoza smartly, "I shall never have a castle while I live, if I must use those means for obtaining one. A speaking Toy! Fy! That is so indecent. —— Prince, in one word, you know my reasons, and with great seriousness I now reiterate my menaces."

"But, either do not complain of my trials, or at least hint at some persons, to whom you think we may have recourse: for I am quite uneasy that the affair is not terminated. Libertin Toys, and what next? Libertin Toys, and always Libertin Toys."

"I have great confidence," says Mirzoza, "in Egle's Toy; and I wait with impatience for the end of the fortnight which you demanded of me."

"Madam," replied Mangogul, "that term expired yesterday; and while Selim was telling you stories of the old court, I learnt from Egle's Toy, that,

thanks to the ill humor of Celebi, and the constant attendance of Almanzor, it's mistress can do you no service."

"Ah! Prince," cry'd the favourite, "what have you said?" "'Tis fact," replied the Sultan; "I will regale you with that story some other time: but in the mean while seek another string to your bow."

"Egle, the virtuous Egle, has at length given herself the lye," says the favorite in a surprize; "indeed I cannot recover myself." "I see you are quite unhinged," replies Mangogul, "and know not whither to turn yourself."

"Not so," says the favorite; "but I own to you that I depended much on Egle." "Pray think no more about it," added Mangogul; "only tell us if she was the only virtuous woman that you know."

"No, Prince, there are a hundred others, and amiable women too, whom I will name to you," replied Mirzoza. "I will answer, as much as for myself, for —— for — —"

Mirzoza stop'd short, without having pronounced any one name. Selim could not refrain from smiling, and the Sultan from bursting out into laughter, at the favorite's embarrassment, who knew so many virtuous women, and could not recollect any one.

Mirzoza, piqued at this, turned to Selim, and said: "pray, Selim, help me out, you, who are so great a connoisseur. Prince," continued she directing her discourse to the Sultan, "apply to —— whom shall I name? prithee, Selim, assist me." "To Mirzoza," says Selim. "You make your court to me very ill," replied the favorite. "I am not afraid of the trial, but I abhor it. Name some one else quickly, if you would have me pardon you."

"One may try," says Selim, "if Zaide has found the reality of the ideal lover, which she formed to herself, and to whom she was formerly wont to compare all those who made love to her."

"Zaide?" replys Mangogul. "I must own that she is a very proper subject to make me lose." "She is," added the favorite, "perhaps the only woman,

whose reputation has been spared by the prude Arsinoe and the coxcomb Janeki."

"This is strong," says Mangogul: "but the trial of my ring is a better argument. Let us go directly to her Toy.

"*That Oracle is surer much than Calchas.*"

"How," adds the favorite smiling: "you retain your Racine, like a player."



Sultan Mangogul and the Favourite.

CHAP. XLIX. Twenty-ninth Trial of the Ring.

Zuleiman and Zaide.



MANGOGUL, WITHOUT ANSWERING the favorite's joke, departed instantly, and went to Zaide's house. He found her retired in a closet, at a small table, on which he observed some letters, a portrait, and some trifles scatter'd here and there, which came from a cherished lover, as it was easy to presume, by the fondness she expressed for them. She was writing; tears ran down her cheeks, and wetted the paper. Every now and then she kiss'd the portrait with transport opened the letters, wrote some words, returned to the portrait, snatched up the above mentioned trifles, and pressed them to her breast.

The Sultan's astonishment was incredible; he had never seen any tender woman, but the favorite and Zaide. He thought himself beloved by Mirzoza: but did not Zaide love Zuleiman better still? And were not this pair the only true lovers of Congo.

The tears, which Zaide shed in writing, were not tears of sorrow. 'Twas love that made them flow. And in that moment, a delicious sentiment, which arose from a certainty of possessing the heart of Zuleiman, was the only one that affected her. "Dear Zuleiman," cry'd she, "how I love thee! how dear thou art to me! How agreeably thou employest me! In those instants, when Zaide has not the happiness of seeing thee, she writes to thee how much she is thine: separated from Zuleiman, his love is the only conversation which gives her pleasure."

Zaide was thus far advanced in her amorous meditation, when Mangogul pointed his ring at her. Immediately he heard her Toy send forth a sigh and repeat the first words of her mistress's monology. "Dear Zuleiman, how I

love thee! how dear thou art to me! how agreeably thou employest me!" Zaide's heart and Toy were too well agreed, to vary in their discourse. Zaide was surprized at first; but she was so sure that her Toy would say nothing, but what Zuleiman might hear with pleasure, that she wish'd him present.

Mangogul repeated his trial, and Zaide's Toy repeated with a soft tender voice: "Zuleiman, dear Zuleiman, how I love thee! how dear thou art to me!" "Zuleiman," says the Sultan, "is the happiest mortal of my empire. Let us abandon this place, where the image of a happiness greater than mine is presented to my sight, and afflicts me." Accordingly he withdrew, and went to his favorite with an air of inquietude and pensiveness. "Prince," says she, "what ails you, you say nothing to me of Zaide?" — — "Zaide is an adorable woman, madam," replied Mangogul. "She loves beyond any thing that ever loved"— "So much the worse for her," says Mirzoza. "What do you say?" replied the Sultan. — — "I say," answers the favorite, "that Kermades is one of the most disagreeable persons of Congo; that interest and the authority of the parents made that match; and that there never was a couple worse sorted than Kermades and Zaide."

"But, madam," replies Mangogul, "it is not her husband that she loves" — — "Who then?" says Mirzoza. — —"'Tis Zuleiman," replies Mangogul — — "Adieu then to the Porcelains and the little Sapajou," added the Sultana — — "Ah!" says Mangogul whispering to himself, "this Zaide has struck me: she pursues me, she occupies my thoughts; I must absolutely see her again." Mirzoza interrupted him by some questions, which he answered in monosyllables. He refused a game of piquet which she proposed, complain'd of a head-ach which he counterfeited, retired to his appartment, went to bed without supping, which he had never done before, and had no sleep. The charms and tenderness of Zaide, the qualities and happiness of Zuleiman tormented him the whole night.

One may easily imagine, that he had no business so much in his head this day, as to return to Zaide. He walk'd out of his palace, even without enquiring after Mirzoza, the first time that ever he fail'd in this point. He found Zaide in the same closet as the preceding day, and Zuleiman with her; who held his mistresses hands between his own, and had his eyes fixed on her. Zaide on her knees, and inclining forward, darted glances animated with the most ardent passion on Zuleiman. They continued some time in this attitude: but both in the same instant yielding to the violence of their desires, they rush'd into each others arms, and embraced with eagerness. The profound silence, which had hitherto reigned about them, was disturbed by their sighs, the sound of their mutual kisses, and some inarticulated words, which slip'd from them — — "You love me!" — — "I adore you" — — "Will you love me constantly?" — — "Alas! the last sigh of my life shall be for Zaide! — —"

Mangogul overwhelm'd with sorrow, threw himself into an easy chair, and covered his eyes with his hand. He dreaded seeing things, which are easily imagined, and yet did not happen. After a silence of some moments, "Ah! dear and tender lover," says Zaide, "why have I not always found you such as you are at present? I should not love you the less, nor should I have any reproach to throw on myself. —— But you weep, dear Zuleiman. Come, dear and tender lover, come, and let me wipe off your tears. Zuleiman, you cast down your eyes, what ails you? Pray look on me. —— Come, dear friend, come, that I may comfort thee: cling thy lips on my mouth, breathe thy soul into me, receive mine; suspend —— Ah! no —— no" —— Zaide finished her discourse with a deep sigh, and was silent.

The African author informs us, that this scene touched Mangogul most sensibly, that he built some hopes on the impotence of Zuleiman, and that some secret proposals were made on his behalf to Zaide, who rejected them, and never made any merit of it with her lover.

CHAP. L. Platonic Love.



"BUT IS THIS Zaide an unique? Mirzoza is no ways inferior to her in charms, and I have a thousand proofs of her affection. I desire to be loved, I am, and who has told me that Zuleiman is more so than I? I was a fool to envy another's happiness. No, there is no man under the heavens happier than Mangogul." Thus began the remonstrances, which the Sultan made to himself. The author has surpressed the rest, and contents himself with apprizing us, that the prince paid more regard to them, than to those which his ministers presented him with, and that Zaide never after returned on his mind.

One of those evenings, that he was entirely satisfied with his mistress or with himself, he proposed sending for Selim, to walk in the groves of the Seraglio. These were verdant closets, where many things may be said and done without witnesses. In their way thither, Mangogul turn'd the conversation on the reasons people have for loving. Mirzoza, mounted on grand principles, and fill'd with idea's of virtue, which certainly did not suit with her rank, person, or age, maintain'd that people very frequently loved for the sake of loving; and that connections begun by a likeness of characters, supported by esteem, and cemented by mutual confidence, were very lasting and constant; without any pretensions to favors on the man's side, or on the woman's any temptation to grant them.

"Thus it is, Madam," replied the Sultan, "that you have been spoil'd by romances. In them you have seen hero's respectuous, and princesses virtuous even to folly; without reflecting that those Beings never existed but in the brains of authors. If you ask Selim, who thoroughly well knows the catechism of Cythera, 'what is love?' I would lay a wager that he would answer you, that love, is nothing else but — —"

“Would you lay a wager,” interrupted the Sultana, “that delicacy of sentiments is but a chimæra, and that without hopes of enjoyment, there would not be a grain of love in the world? If so, you must certainly entertain a very bad opinion of the human heart.”

“So I do,” replied Mangogul, “our virtues are not more disinterested than our vices. The brave pursues glory by exposing himself to dangers; the coward loves tranquility and life; and the lover desires enjoyment.”

Selim declaring himself of the Sultan’s party, added, that if two things happened, love would be banished from society, never more to make its appearance again.

“And which are those two things?” says the favorite. “They are,” replied Mangogul, “if you and I, madam, and all the race of mankind, chanced to lose what Tanzai and Neadarne found in a dream.”

“What! You believe,” interrupted Mirzoza, “that without those pitiful things, there would be neither esteem nor confidence between two persons of different sexes? A woman adorn’d with talents, wit and beauty, would not touch? A man bless’d with an amiable person, a fine genius, and excellent character, would not be heeded?”

“No, madam,” replies Mangogul; “for pray tell me what he would say?”

“A number of pretty things, which I think would always afford much pleasure to hear,” answers the favorite.

“Observe, madam,” says Selim, “that those things are said every day without love. No, no, madam, I have complete proofs, that without a well organised body, there is no love. Agenor, the handsomest young man of Congo, and the most refined wit of the court, would, if I had been a woman, in vain shew me his genteel leg, turn his large blue eyes on me, squander on me the most artful praise, and set himself off with every other advantage of which he is master; I would say but one word, and if he did not give an

express answer to this word, I might have all possible esteem for him, but I should not love him."

"That is positive," added the Sultan, "and you yourself will allow the justness and utility of this mysterious word, when one loves. You ought indeed, for your instruction, to cause the conversation of a wit of Banza with a school-master to be related to you. You could comprehend in an instant, how the wit, who sustained your thesis, confessed in the end that he was in the wrong, and that his antagonist reasoned like a Toy. But Selim, of whom I had it, will you tell the story."

The favorite imagined, that a story, which Mangogul would not relate to her, must be very mortifying: and therefore she went into one of the arbors, without asking it of Selim, and happy it was for him; for with all his wit, he would have ill satisfied the favorite's curiosity, or much allarm'd her modesty. But in order to amuse her, and make her forget the story of the school-master, he related the following.

"Madam," says the courtier, "in a vast country near the sources of the Nile, lived a young man, beautiful as Adonis. Before he was eighteen years of age, all the maidens contended for his heart, and there were few women, who would not accept of him for their lover. Born with an amorous heart, he loved as soon as he was in a condition to love.

"On a certain day, while he was in the temple assisting at the public worship of the great Pagoda; and was, according to the usual ceremony, preparing to make the seventeen genuflexions prescribed by the law; the beauty, with which he was captivated, chanced to pass by, and darted a glance on him accompany'd with a smile, which threw him into such distraction, that he lost his poize, fell on his nose, scandalized the congregation by his fall, forgot the number of genuflexions, and performed but sixteen.

“The great Pagoda irritated at the offence and scandal, punished him cruelly. Hilas, for that was his name, the poor Hilas felt himself instantly inflamed with the most violent desires, and smack-smooth as the palm of his hand, deprived of the means of gratifying them. Equally surprized and grieved at so great a loss, he consulted the Pagoda. ‘Thou shalt never be restored to thy pristine state,’ answered she sneezing, ‘but between the arms of a woman, who shall not love thee the less for knowing thy misfortune.’

“Presumption is generally the companion of youth and beauty. Hilas fancied that his wit and the comeliness of his person would soon gain him a heart of nice sentiments; who content with what he had remaining, would love him for himself, and soon restore to him what he had lost. He first addrest himself to the lady, who had been the innocent cause of his misfortune. She was young, brisk, voluptuous and a coquet. Hilas adored her, and obtained a meeting; where by a train of allurements he was drawn into the road leading to a place which it was impossible for him to reach. In vain did he torment himself, and in the arms of his mistress seek the accomplishment of the oracle: nothing appeared. When the lady was tired of waiting, she set herself to rights in a moment, and quitted him. The worst of the affair was, that the foolish girl told it in confidence to one of her female friends, who, out of her great discretion, related it but to three or four of hers, who did the same to as many others: so that Hilas, two days before the darling of all the sex, was despised, pointed at, and looked on as a monster.

“The wretched Hilas, cried down in his native country, resolved to travel, and seek a remedy for his disease in remote climes. He set out alone, and arrived incognito at the court of the Abyssinian emperor. The young stranger was singled out by the ladies, and the contest was, who should have him but Hilas prudently avoided all engagements, in which he had apprehensions of not finding his account, proportionable to his certainty that the women who pursued him would not find theirs in him. But observe

and admire the penetration of the sex: ‘a man so young, so comely, and so modest,’ said they, ’is quite a prodigy:’ and the union of these qualities in him had almost made them suspect his real defect; so as, for fear of allowing him what an accomplished man should have, to refuse him the very thing which he wanted.

“After having for some time studied the chart of the country, Hilas linked an acquaintance with a young woman, who, by some unknown caprice, had passed from refined gallantry to the highest devotion. He gradually insinuated himself into her confidence, espoused her notions, copied her practices, handed her in and out of the temples, and conversed with her so frequently on the vanity of worldly pleasures, that he insensibly revived her taste, as well as remembrance of them. They had now, for above a month, frequented the mosques, assisted at sermons, and visited the sick together, when he prepared himself for a thorough cure; but all in vain. His devote friend, tho’ intimately acquainted with all the transactions of heaven, knew as well as others, how a man should be made on earth: and the poor lad lost in a moment all the fruits of his good works. If any thing consoled him, it was, that his secret was inviolably kept. One word would have rendered his disease incurable; but this word was not uttered, and Hilas linked in with some other pious women, whom he took, one after another, for the specific ordained by the oracle, and who did not break his enchantment, because they loved him only for what he was not. The habit, they had acquired of spiritualizing all objects, was of no service to him. They required sense, but it was of that sort which springs from pleasure. Hilas complained that they did not love him. But their answer was, ‘pray, sir, are you ignorant, that people should know each other, before they love; nay, you must acknowledge, that, disgraced as you are, you are not lovely even when you are known.’

“‘Alas!’ said he retiring, ‘this pure love, so much talked of, is no where to be found; this delicacy of sentiments, upon which both sexes value themselves, is a mere chimæra. The oracle has deceived me, and my disease is for life.’

“In his way, he met some of those women, who allow no other commerce with man, but that of the heart, and who hate a forward spark like a toad. They so seriously recommended to him to let nothing gross and terrestrial enter into his views, that he conceived great hopes of his cure. He complied heartily, and was quite astonished, after the amorous conversations, which they held with him, that he still remained as he was. ‘I must certainly be cured,’ said he to himself, ‘but perhaps otherwise than by words:’ and he sought an occasion of placing himself according to the intentions of the oracle. Thus it soon offered. A young female platonic, who was excessively fond of walking, led him into a lonesome wood and when they had penetrated far from the reach of any impertinent eye, the fair one was seized with a fainting fit. Hilas threw himself on her, and neglected nothing in his power to relieve her; but all his endeavours were fruitless: of which she soon became as sensible as himself. ‘Ah! Sir,’ cried she, disengaging herself from his arms, ‘what sort of man are you? I shall be very cautious of ever venturing thus into lonesome places, where I have been taken so ill, and may dye a hundred times for want of help.’

“Others knew his condition, pitied him, protested to him, that the tenderness they had conceived for him, should not change; and never saw him more.

“The miserable Hilas, with his graceful figure, and the most refined sentiments, gave great dissatisfaction to many ladies.”

“Then he was a fool,” interrupted the Sultan. “Why did he not address some of the vestals, of which our monasteries are full? They would be

charmed with him, and he would infallibly receive his cure through a grate."

"Prince," replied Selim, "chronicles assure us, that he tried that method, and found by experience, that the sex of all conditions do not care to love to their certain loss." "If that be the case," said the Sultan, "I take his distemper to be incurable." "So did he himself as well as your highness," continued Selim; "and tired out with unsuccessful trials, he plunged himself into solitude, on the word of an infinite number of women, who had expresly declared to him, that he was useless in society.

"He had already been several days rambling in a desert, when he heard some sighs issuing from a lonely place. He listened, the sighs began again, he drew near, and saw a young maiden, fair as the morn, her head leaning on her hand, her eyes bathed in tears, and the rest of her body in a pensive and mournful posture. 'What seek you here, madam?' said he to her. 'And are these deserts made for you?' 'Yes,' replied she in a melancholy strain: 'I can at least afflict myself here quite at my ease.' 'And what is the cause of your affliction?'— 'Alas!'— 'Speak, madam, what is the cause?' — — 'Nothing' — — 'How, nothing?' — — 'No, nothing at all, I say, is the cause of my grief: two years ago I had the misfortune to offend a Pagoda, who deprived me of my all: and it was so small a matter, that in so doing, she gave no great proof of her power. Since that time, all the men shun me, and will shun me, said the Pagoda, until I meet with one, who knowing my misfortune, will cleave to me, and love me in the state, in which I am.'

"'What do I hear!' cried Hilas. 'This wretch, whom you behold at your feet, has nothing, and that is his distemper likewise. Some time since he had the misfortune to offend a Pagoda, who deprived him of all that he had, and without vanity it was somewhat. From that time all the women shun him, and will shun him, said the Pagoda, until he meets with one, who, knowing his misfortune, will cleave to him, and love him in the state, in which he is.'

“‘Is this possible?’ says the young maiden. — — ‘Is what you have told me true?’ says Hilas. — — ‘See,’ answered the maiden. ‘See,’ answered Hilas.

“They both convinced each other beyond all doubt, that they were two objects of the celestial wrath. Their common misfortune united them. Iphis, this was the young maiden’s name, was made for Hilas, Hilas was made for her. They loved each other in a platonic manner, as you may easily imagine; for they could not well love otherwise: but in an instant the inchantment was broken, they uttered cries of joy on the event, and platonic love vanished.

“During several months, that they continued together in the desert, they had full time to be persuaded of their change. When they quitted it, Iphis was perfectly cured; but as to Hilas, the author says that he was threatned with a relapse.”

CHAP. LI. Thirtieth and last trial of the Ring.

Mirzoza.



WHILE MANGOGUL WAS entertaining himself with the favorite and Selim, news was brought him of the death of Sulamek. Sulamek's rise began by being appointed the Sultan's dancing-master, and that even contrary to the intentions of Erguebzed: but some intriguing ladies, whom he had taught certain dangerous steps, pushed him with all their might, and so bestirred themselves, that he was preferred to Marcel and others, whose deputy he was not worthy of being. He possessed the spirit of trifling, the court jargon, the gift of telling diverting stories, and of amusing children; but he knew nothing of the high dance. When the post of Grand Vizir became vacant, by dint of cringing, he supplanted the great Seneschal, who was an indefatigable dancer, but stiff-necked, and bowed with a bad grace. His ministry was not signalized by any events glorious to the nation. His enemies, (and who is there without them? true merit has many) accused him of playing ill on the violin, and of having no knowledge of choregraphy; of having suffered himself to be duped by the Pantomimes of Prester John, and to be affrighted by a bear from Monoémugi, who danced one day before him; of having given millions to the emperor of Tombur to keep him from dancing, at a time when he had the gout, and spent yearly five hundred thousand Zecchins in resin, and more in persecuting all the fidlers, who played any other minuets but his own: in a word, of having slept fifteen years of a stretch, at the sound of a cymbal of a clumsy native of Guinea, who accompanied his instrument with some Congo songs. True it is, that he had introduced the fashion of Dutch lime trees, &c.

Mangogul had an excellent heart: he regretted Sulamek, and ordered him a magnificent burial, with a funeral oration, which the orator Brrrouboubou was ordered to make.

On the day appointed for the ceremony, the chief Bramins, the whole Divan in a body, and the Sultanas led by their eunuchs, went to the great mosque. Brrrouboubou proved for two hours together, with surprizing rapidity, that Sulamek had risen to his high station by superior talents, made prefaces on prefaces, did not forget either Mangogul or his exploits during the administration of Sulamek; and he had almost spent himself in exclamations, when Mirzoza, to whom a lye gave the vapors, fell into a fit of the lethargy.

Her officers and women ran to her assistance; she was put into her palanquine, and instantly carried to the Seraglio. Mangogul, being informed of the danger she was in, ran to her; and the whole Pharmacopoeia was rummaged. The Garus, general la Motte's drops, the English drops, were all tried, but to no purpose. The distressed Sultan, one moment weeping over Mirzoza, the next swearing at Orcotomus, at length was deprived of all hopes, except some glimmerings which might remain in his ring. "If I have lost you, delight of my soul," cried he, "your Toy, as well as your mouth, must keep eternal silence."

In an instant he commanded every body to withdraw: he was obeyed; and being alone with the favorite, he turned his ring on her. But Mirzoza's Toy, which was tired at the sermon, as it happens to others every day, and besides had probably a touch of the lethargy, at first only mutter'd some confused and ill articulated words. The Sultan repeated the experiment, and the Toy then very distinctly said: "Separated from you, Mangogul, what would become of me? — Faithful even to the grave, I would have sought you; and if love and constancy have any recompence among the dead, dear prince, I would have found you — Alas! without you the delightful palace

where Brama dwells, and which he has promised to his true believers, would prove a disagreeable residence to me."

Mangogul, transported with joy, did not perceive that the favorite was recovering from her lethargy; and that, if he did not turn off his ring, she would hear the last words of her Toy: which happened accordingly. "Ah! prince," said she, "what is become of your oaths? You have then cleared up your unjust suspicions? Nothing has withheld you, neither the condition I was in, the injury you were doing me, nor the word you had given me?"

"Madam," replied the Sultan, "impute not to a shameful curiosity, an impatience, which the despair for having lost you, has alone suggested to me. It was not an usual trial of my ring, that I made on you; but I believed that I might, without breach of promise, make use of a resource, which restores you to my vows, and secures my heart to you for ever."

"Prince," says the favorite, "I believe you; but pray restore the ring to the Genius, and let not his fatal present disturb your heart or empire for the future."

Mangogul immediately made a prayer, and Cucufa appeared. "Almighty Genius," said Mangogul, "take back your ring, and continue me your protection". "Prince," answered the Genius, "divide your days between love and glory. Mirzoza will certainly afford you the first of these blessings; and I promise you the second."

At these words the hooded spectre closed the tails of his owls, and went off, as he came, in a whirling motion.

THE END

Memoirs of a Nun (1796)



Translated by Francis Birrell, 1928

Original French Title: 'La Religieuse'

In 1743, Diderot further alienated his father by marrying Antoinette Champion (1710-1796), a devout Roman Catholic. This match was considered inappropriate due to Champion's low social standing, poor education, fatherless status and her lack of a dowry. She was about three years older than Diderot. The marriage took place in October 1743 and produced one surviving child, a girl named Angélique after both Diderot's dead mother and his sister. The tragic death of this sister, a nun serving in a convent, may have affected Diderot's opinion of religion. She is assumed to have been the inspiration for his mature novel *La Religieuse*, about a young lady that is forced to enter a convent, where she suffers at the hands of the other nuns. This novel was not completed until about 1780 and it would not be published until even later in 1792, eight years after Diderot's death.

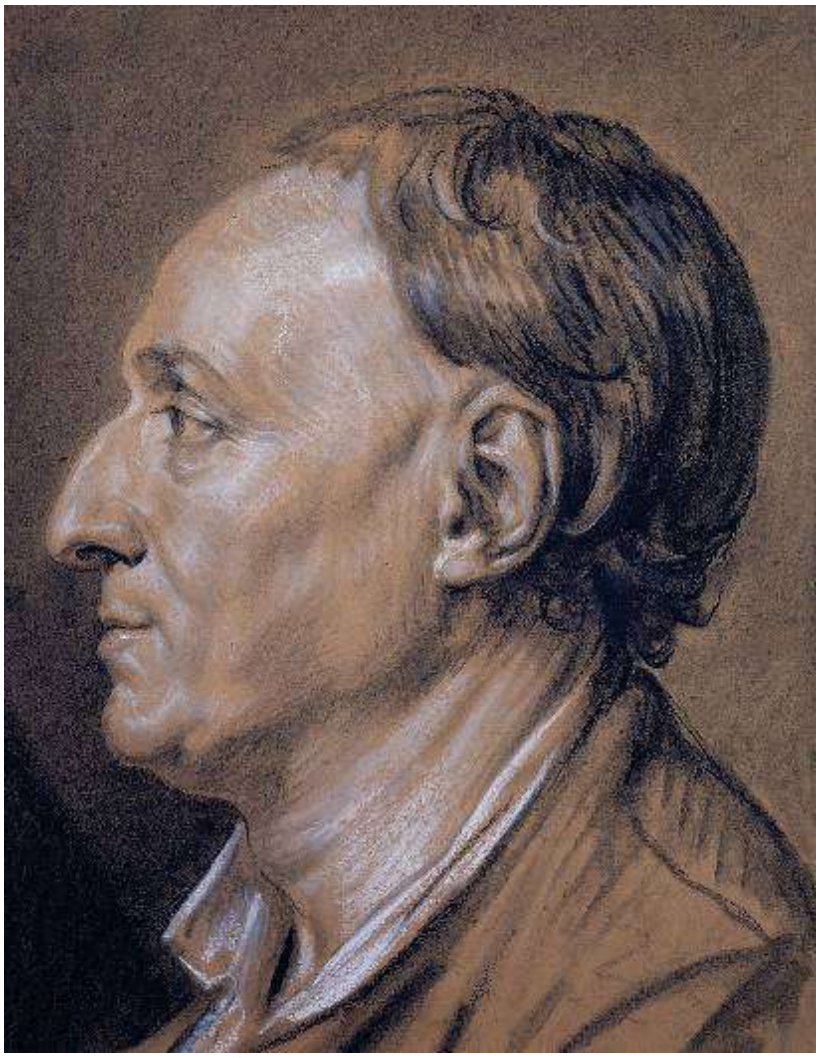
La Religieuse began not as a work for literary consumption, but as an elaborate practical joke aimed at luring the Marquis de Croismare, Diderot's trusted companion, back to Paris. The novel consists of a series of letters purporting to be from a nun, Suzanne, who implores the Marquis to help her renounce her vows, and describes her intolerable life in the convent to which she has been committed against her will.

In 1758, the Marquis had involved himself in a controversial case where a nun, Marguerite Delamarre, was trying to be dispensed from her vows and return to society. The Marquis pitied Marguerite and unsuccessfully tried to use his political influence to liberate her. After losing the case in 1758, Marguerite was forced to remain in the convents for the rest of her life.

Diderot used Marguerite Delamarre as a prototype for Suzanne, thinking Croismare would be persuaded to return to Paris in order to save Suzanne from her misery in the convent.

Eventually, the practical joke turned into a passionate project for Diderot, in which he self-identifies as a woman. He later revised the letters into a novel, depicting corruption that was supposedly widespread among the clergy and religious institutions. When Diderot publicly admitted his role in the ruse, the Marquis is said to have laughed at the revelation, unsurprisingly since he had behaved with exemplary compassion and generosity in his willingness to help the imaginary Suzanne.

La Religieuse takes place during a time in France when religious vows were enforced by the government. Diderot was probably, though not certainly, an atheist; he used the novel to attack the supposed corruption of the Catholic Church's institutions, which foster a hierarchical power dynamic between the Mother Superior and the girls, who are forced to take their vows. He depicts the life in the convent as intolerable, dehumanising and sexually repressive. Through his cross-identification writing style, Diderot reveals the demeaning Catholic standards towards women that forced them to obey their determined fate under the hierarchical society.



Portrait of Diderot by Jean-Baptiste Greuze, 1766

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MEMOIRS OF A NUN (LA RELIGIEUSE)
PREFACE TO THE PRECEDING WORK, TAKEN FROM THE CORRESPONDANCE LITTÉRAIRE OF M. GRIMM, 1770



Marc-Antoine-Nicolas de Croismare, Marquis of Lasson (1694-1772) was a French dilettante, mostly known for having inspired 'La Religieuse'.

MEMOIRS OF A NUN (LA RELIGIEUSE)



THE ANSWER OF the Marquis de Croismare, if indeed he replies to me, will provide the first lines of this story. Even before I wrote to him, I wished to know him. He is a man of the world, grown illustrious in the service; he is elderly and has been married; he has a son and two daughters, whom he loves and by whom he is cherished. He is of good birth, enlightened, intellectual, gay, fond of the fine arts, particularly of anything original. Praises have been sung me of his warm heart, honour, and probity. And I judged by the lively interest he took in my affairs and by all that I have been told of him that I did not compromise myself by applying to him. But he can hardly be expected to change my lot, without knowing all about me; and it is for this reason that I am resolved on overcoming my vanity and repugnance, and that I undertake these Memoirs, in which I describe some part of my misfortunes without art or skill, but with the simplicity of youth and with my natural frankness. Then in case my protector wished me to finish them, or should I possibly desire to do so myself later, when I may perhaps have forgotten incidents which will have become remote, I have concluded with an outline, which ought to be enough to recall everything to my memory, since I shall always remain deeply affected by what I have gone through.

My father was a lawyer. He had married my mother rather late in life and had three daughters. There was more than enough money to settle them all comfortably; but to do that my parents would have had to love all their daughters equally. And I am far from able to accord them such praise. Certainly I was worth more than the others as regards the attractions of mind and appearance, character and talents. And this was apparently a source of affliction to my parents. The advantage nature and study had

given me over my sisters became a positive inconvenience to me; and so I desired from my earliest years to resemble them, that I might be loved, cherished, made much of, and excused as they were. If it happened that someone said to my mother: “You have charming children” it was never made to apply to me. I was sometimes handsomely avenged for this injustice, but the praises which I had received cost me so dear when I was alone that I would as lief have been treated with indifference or even insult. For the more predilection strangers showed me the greater was the bad temper exhibited once their backs were turned. How often have I wept at not having been born ugly, silly, stupid, and proud: in a word, with all those faults which my parents found so admirable in my sisters. I asked myself whence came this strangeness of temper in a father and mother otherwise respectable, just and pious. Shall I admit it, my lord? Some observations that escaped my father in his wrath (for he was a violent-tempered man), some incidents collected at different times, the remarks of neighbours, hints of servants, all made me suspect a reason which would in some measure excuse them. Perhaps my father was none too certain about my birth; maybe I recalled to my mother a fault she had committed, or the ingratitude of a man to whom she had too gladly listened. How can I tell? But even if my suspicions were ill-founded, there is no risk in confiding them to you. You will burn this writing and I promise to burn your answers.

As we came into the world in quick succession, we grew up together. Eligible offers were made. A charming young man paid his addresses to my eldest sister but I quickly perceived that it was for me that he really cared, and that she would never be more than the excuse for his presence. I foresaw all the trouble which his preference might bring on me, and I warned my mother. Perhaps this was the only thing I ever did which pleased her, and you will see how I was rewarded. Four days, or at least a few days, later I was told that a place in a convent had been decided upon for me, and

the very next day I was taken there. I was so unhappy at home that this did not distress me, and I went off very lightheartedly to my first convent, Saint Mary's. Meanwhile my sister's lover, as he no longer saw me, forgot all about me and married her. He is a solicitor at Corbeil named M.K., and they are as wretched together as possible. My second sister was married to a M. Bauchon, a silk-merchant in Paris, rue Quincampoix, and they are quite reasonably happy.

My two sisters being set up in life, I assumed that my parents would now think of me, and that before long I should leave the convent. I was then sixteen and a half. Fine dowries had been found for my sisters and I promised myself a lot equal to theirs. My head was full of attractive schemes, when I was summoned into the parlour. There I found Father Seraphim, who had been my mother's spiritual director as well as my own. Hence he experienced no embarrassment in explaining the motive of his visit. In fact, I was to take the veil. I protested against this strange proposition, and declared roundly that I felt in no way drawn towards the cloister.

"So much the worse for you," he answered, "for your parents have denuded themselves for your sisters and I cannot at all see what they could do for you in the straitened circumstances to which they are reduced. Think it over. You must either enter this House permanently or go away into some provincial convent at which you will be received for a modest yearly payment, and which you will be able to leave only on the death of your parents; and that may still be a long way off!"

I complained bitterly, and shed a flood of tears. The Superior, who had been informed about everything, was waiting for me as I left the parlour. I was in a state of indescribable distress. She said: "What is the matter, my dear child?" (she understood better even than I did); "what a state you are in! I have never seen anything like it. You quite terrify me. Have you lost

your father or mother?" I thought of throwing myself into her arms and answering: "Would to God I had!" But I contented myself with crying out: "Alas! I am a wretched girl, whom everyone hates and wants to bury alive here." She allowed the torrent to pass and awaited the moment of calm. I explained to her more clearly the announcement that had just been made. She seemed sorry for me, and encouraged me not to embrace a state for which I felt no vocation. She promised to pray, remonstrate, and plead on my behalf. Oh, my lord, how insincere these Mothers Superior are! You can have no idea of it. She wrote indeed, but knew perfectly well beforehand the answers she would get. She communicated them to me and only long afterwards did I learn to doubt her good faith. Meanwhile the time allowed me to make up my mind was over, and she came to tell me so with studied grief. First she remained silent and then threw me out a few words of commiseration, from which I gathered all the rest. There followed a scene of despair, and indeed I shall have scarcely any other kind of scene to describe to you. Mothers Superior are past-mistresses in the art of self-control. But at last she said, and I really believe she was crying: "So, child, you are going to leave us and we shall not see you again" and some other remarks which I did not hear. I had thrown myself onto a chair, and kept silent or broke into sobs, remained motionless, or got up, went sometimes to lean against the wall and sometimes to give way to my grief upon her breast. But after this she added: "There is one thing you might do. Listen to me, and never mention a word of the advice I am going to give you. I count on your absolute discretion, and for nothing in the world would I lay myself open to reproach. What are you being asked to do? To become a novice. But why not do so? You are committed to nothing except to live with us for two years. One can never tell who will be living and who will die. Two years is a long time. A lot can happen in two years." And she joined many caresses,

protestations of friendship, and much false sweetness to her insidious proposals.

"I knew where I was; I knew not whither I was being led", and I let myself be persuaded. Then she wrote to my father. Her letter was excellent: indeed it could not have been bettered. My sufferings, my grief, my protests were in no wise passed over, and I assure you that a girl more clear-sighted than myself would have been deceived. And so it ended with my giving my consent. How quickly everything was got ready! The day was fixed, my clothes made, the moment of the ceremony come, without there seeming to-day to have been any interval between these steps.

I forgot to tell you that I saw my father and mother, that I left no stone unturned to soften them, and that I found them inflexible. The Abbé Blin, Doctor of the Sorbonne, gave me the exhortation. The Bishop of Aleppo passed me the habit. The ceremony is not gay in itself, and on this occasion it was as gloomy as could be. Though the nuns pressed round me to support me, I felt my knees giving way a score of times, and I all but fell on to the steps of the altar. I saw and heard nothing and was quite brutish. They led me and I went. They questioned me and answered in my place. At last the cruel ceremony was over; everyone withdrew, and I remained with the flock to which I had just joined myself. My companions surrounded me and embraced me, saying: "Look, sister, how handsome she is! How well the black veil suits the whiteness of her complexion! How nicely it rounds off her head and fills out her cheeks! How beautifully the habit shows off her figure and arms." I scarcely heard them, I was so unhappy. But I must confess that once alone in my cell I remembered their flatteries and could not help looking in my small mirror to judge for myself, and it seemed to me that they were not entirely undeserved. There are special honours attached to such an occasion, and they were particularly grand in my case, but they made scarcely any impression on me. People pretended to think the

opposite and told me so, though it was obvious nonsense. In the evening, after prayers, the Superior came into my cell. “Really,” she said after scrutinizing me a little, “I cannot understand your objection to the habit. It suits you marvellously and you are quite charming. Sister Susan is a very good-looking nun. You will be all the more popular on that account. Come along, let’s see; walk a little. You don’t hold yourself sufficiently upright. You mustn’t stoop like that.”

She arranged my head, feet, hands, waist, and arms for me – quite a lesson by Marcel on monastic elegance. For each state of life has its own brand. Then she sat down and said: “That’s right, but now we must talk seriously. Two years have been gained. Your parents may change their plan: you perhaps will want to remain when they want to take you away.”

“Never believe it, Madam.”

“You have been long among us, but you do not know our life. It has its pains no doubt, but also its consolations.”

You can very well imagine all that she added about the world and the cloister: it is written everywhere and always in the same way. For, heaven knows, I have had to read any amount of the rubbish that the monks have poured forth about their state, which they know well and hate, directed against the world, which they attack, love, and do not know.

I will not go into the details of my novitiate. Were all its rigours observed, no one would survive it. As a matter of fact, it is the pleasantest period of conventual life. A Novice Mistress is the most indulgent Sister imaginable – her mission is to hide from you all the thorns of the profession. As a course of seduction, nothing could be more subtle or refined. She it is who deepens the darkness surrounding you, rocks your cradle, puts you to sleep, imposes on you, and fascinates you. My own was particularly attached to me. I do not believe that any young and inexperienced nature could resist such deadly art. The world has its

precipices, but I do not believe that the slope leading down to them can be so gentle. If I sneezed twice I was excused Divine Service, work, and prayer. I went to bed earlier, got up later: the rule ceased for me. Believe me, my lord, there were days when I sighed for a moment of self-sacrifice. Nothing disagreeable happens in the outside world without your hearing of it. True stories are rearranged, false ones invented, while unending praises and thank-offerings are made to God, Who has screened us from such humiliating adventures. But the hour approached, which I had sometimes desired to hasten. Then I became moody, feeling my objections awaken and increase. I went and confided them to the Superior or to our Novice Mistress. These women have their revenge on you for the way you bore them. For you must not suppose that they enjoy the hypocritical part they play and the ridiculous remarks they are compelled to repeat to you. Finally, all this becomes stale and repulsive to them: but they force their natures; and all for the few hundred pounds which come into the house. This is the important object for which they tell lies all their lives and prepare innocent girls for forty or fifty years of despair, and perhaps for eternal misery. For it is certain, my lord, that out of a hundred nuns who die before fifty there are exactly a hundred who are damned, not counting those who go mad, brutish or raving in the process.

One day one of these poor demented creatures escaped from the cell, where she was kept shut up. I saw her. It depends, my lord, on the way you treat me whether I am to date my good fortune or my ruin from that moment. I have never seen anything so horrible. Her hair was in disorder and she was almost naked; she dragged after her her iron chains; her eyes were wild; she tore out her hair; she struck her breast with her fists; she ran about howling; she called down hideous imprecations on herself and others; she looked for a window to hurl herself out of. Terror seized me; I trembled in every limb; I saw my fate in that of the unhappy woman, and

immediately I decided in my heart I would die a thousand times over before exposing myself likewise. They foresaw the effect which this sight might have on my mind and thought they must counteract it. I was told any number of ridiculous and self-contradictory lies about this nun; how she was already deranged when she was received; how she had had a great fright at a critical time; how she had become subject to visions; how she thought herself in communication with angels; how she had read some pernicious books, which had affected her mind; how she had listened to some extravagant moral reformer, who had so terrified her with God's judgment that her mind had been shaken and then completely unbalanced; how she never saw anything except demons, hell, and a gulf of fire; adding that they were very unhappy about it; that they had never had anything like it before in the house; and anything else you please. But this made no effect on me. Every moment my mad nun came back to mind and I renewed my oath to take no vow.

The moment had, however, come when I must prove that I could keep my word. One morning, after service, I saw the Superior come into my cell. She had a letter in her hand and her expression was one of sadness and discouragement: her arms were hanging down listlessly, and her hand seemed hardly strong enough to hold the letter; she looked at me and tears seemed to be standing in her eyes. She was silent and so was I. She waited for me to speak first, but I restrained myself. She asked me how I felt, said that the Service had been long that day, that I had coughed a little and that she thought I was unwell, to all of which I answered: "No, Mother." She still held the letter hanging from her hand, and in the midst of her questions she put it on my knees, so that her hand still partly held it. Finally, after putting me some questions about my father and mother and having observed that I did not ask what this paper might be, she said: "Here is a

letter.” I felt my heart beat at the word, and I added in a broken voice, with trembling lips: “From my mother?”

“That is so. Come, read it.”

I collected myself a little, took the letter and read it, at first fairly coolly; but as I continued, terror, indignation, anger, fury, different passions succeeded each other in my heart. My tone of voice, my expression changed from moment to moment. Sometimes I hardly held the paper or held it as though about to tear it up; or I clutched it violently as if tempted to crumple it and throw it right away from me.

“Well, my child, and what is your answer?”

“You know quite well.”

“No I do not. Times are bad, your family has had losses. Your sisters’ affairs are in disorder: both have a large family. Your parents impoverished themselves at the moment of the marriages and have since ruined themselves to support their children. They cannot possibly do anything satisfactory for you. You have taken the habit: the necessary expenses were paid. You held out hopes for the future when you took this step. The rumour of your coming profession has spread abroad. For the rest, count on my help. I have never driven anyone into Religion; it is a state to which God calls us, and it is very dangerous to mingle His voice with one’s own. I shall not attempt to speak to your heart if Grace does nothing. Till now, I have not to reproach myself with another’s unhappiness. Am I likely to begin, my child, with you who are so dear to me? I have not forgotten how it was at my persuasion that you took the first step, and I will not let people abuse this fact to engage you further than you will. Come, let us concert a plan. Do you wish to make profession?”

“No.”

“You feel in no way drawn to the religious state?”

“No.”

“What do you want to be then?”

“Anything except a nun. I do not want to be one, and I will not be one.”

“Very well. You shall not be one. We will draw up an answer to your mother.”

We agreed on the general lines. She wrote a letter which she showed me and which I thought excellent. Meanwhile the Director of the House was despatched to me and also the doctor, who had preached the sermon on my taking the habit. I was recommended to the Novice Mistress and saw the Bishop of Aleppo. I crossed swords with some pious women who meddled in my affairs, though they did not know me. There were continual conferences with monks and priests. My father came; my sisters wrote; my mother appeared last. I resisted everything. Meanwhile the day was chosen for my profession. Nothing was neglected to obtain my assent; but when they saw it was useless to ask for it they decided to get along without it.

From that moment I was confined to my cell; silence was imposed on me; I was separated from everybody and thrown on my own resources. I saw quite plainly that they were resolved to dispose of me without my consent. I was determined not to make any profession. That was definite, and none of the terrors, true or false, with which I was threatened shook my resolution. Still, I was in a deplorable state. I did not know how long it might last – and suppose it stopped, I knew still less what might happen to me. Amid these uncertainties I took a step, my lord, which you will judge as you may. I no longer saw anybody, not the Superior, or the Novice Mistress or my companions. I had the first of these summoned and pretended to fall in with my parents’ wishes. But my plan was to end this persecution with a scandal, and publicly to protest against the meditated violence. I told them that they were masters of my fate and could dispose of me as they would; they demanded I should make my profession and I would do so. In a moment joy spread through the House and all was caresses once more, with

the old flattery and cajolery. God had spoken to my heart. No one more than myself was made for the state of perfection. It was impossible it should not be so, and it had always been expected. No one who is not really called ever performed their duties with the edification and consistency I had shown. The Novice Mistress had never seen a more evident vocation in any of her pupils. She was surprised at the difficulties I had made, but she had always said to the Mother Superior that they must hold fast and that it would pass; that the best nuns often went through these crises; that they were suggestions of the Evil One, who redoubled his efforts when about to lose his prey; that I was now about to escape from him and henceforth it would be roses all the way: that the obligations of the religious life would be all the easier for my having so much exaggerated them, and that the sudden weighting of the yoke was intended by Heaven to make it seem less heavy afterwards. I thought it curious that the same thing came from God or the Devil, just as one chose to look at it. Religion can provide many cases of the same kind. Some of my consolers said that my thoughts were so many instigations of Satan and others that they were so many inspirations from God. One and the same ill comes either from God who proves or from the Devil who tempts us.

I conducted myself discreetly, and thought I could answer for myself. I saw my father – he spoke to me coldly; my mother, and she kissed me. I received letters of congratulation from my sisters and many others. I knew that a M. Sornin, Vicar of Saint-Roch, would preach the sermon and that M. Thierry, Chancellor of the University, would receive my vows. Everything went well till the evening of the great day, except that having learned that the ceremony was to be secret and that there would be very few present and that the church door would be open only to relations, I invited, by means of the doorkeeper, all my friends of both sexes who lived near. I had permission to write to some acquaintances. All this unexpected concourse

presented itself at the door. They could not be excluded, and the congregation was just about what was needed for my plan. How terrible, my lord, was that last night! I did not get into bed, but sat on it and called God to my assistance. I raised my hands to the heavens and called on them as witnesses to the violence done me. I visualized my part at the foot of the altar, a young girl protesting loudly against an action to which she had apparently consented, the shocked feelings of the company, the despair of the nuns, the rage of my parents.

"O Lord! What is to happen to me?"

As I pronounced these words a general weakness overcame me and I fell fainting on my bolster. A shivering fit succeeded the fainting, when my knees beat together and my teeth chattered noisily. This shivering fit was followed by a terrible heat and my mind grew clouded. I do not remember having undressed or having left my cell. But I was found naked but for my shirt, stretched on the ground at the door of the Superior, motionless and almost lifeless. All this I learned subsequently. Next morning I found myself in my cell, my bed surrounded by the Superior, the Novice Mistress, and those who are called assistants. I was much depressed. I was put some questions, and it was clear from my answers that I had no knowledge of what had occurred. Nobody spoke of it. I was asked about my health, if I persisted in my blessed resolution, and if I felt strong enough to support the fatigue of the day. I answered, "Yes," and contrary to their expectation, they did not have to alter their plans.

Everything had been arranged the day before. The bells were rung to announce to everyone that a girl was to be made wretched. My heart still beat. They came to dress me; it was a day for dressing-up. When I now recall all those ceremonies I feel that they contain much that is solemn and very touching to an innocent girl, not led elsewhere by her temperament. I was taken to Church; Holy Mass was celebrated. The good Vicar, who gave

me credit for a resignation which I was far from feeling, preached a long sermon, every word of which seemed nonsense to me. There was something preposterous in all his observations about my happiness, my grace, my courage, my zeal, my fervour, and the other fine sentiments which he attributed to me. I was disturbed by the contrast between his praise and the step I was about to take. For a few moments I wavered, but it was not for long. I only felt the more strongly that I lacked all the qualities that go to making a good nun. The terrible moment at length arrived. As I entered the place where I had to make my vows my legs gave way beneath me. Two of my companions held me under the arms. My head sank on to one of them as I dragged myself along. I know not what passed through the minds of those present, but in fact they were watching a young victim being dragged dying to the altar; and there arose everywhere sighs and sobs, among which, I am certain, those of my parents were not to be heard. Everyone was standing up; the young people had clambered on to chairs or were clinging to the bars of the grille, and there was a moment of deep silence as he who presided at my profession said to me: “Mary Susan Simonin, do you promise to tell me the truth?”

“I do.”

“Is it of your full pleasure and free will that you are here?”

I replied, “No,” but my companions answered for me, “Yes.”

“Mary Susan Simonin, do you promise to God chastity, poverty, and obedience?”

I hestitated a moment; the priest waited; and I answered: “No, sir.”

He began again.

“Mary Susan Simonin, do you promise to God chastity, poverty, and obedience?”

I answered in a firmer voice:

“No, sir, no.”

He stopped and said: “My child, collect yourself and listen.”

“Monsignor,” I said, “you ask me if I promise to God chastity, poverty, and obedience. I have heard you and I answer ‘No’.”

Then, turning towards those present, from whom a loud murmur was arising, I made a sign that I wished to speak. The murmur stopped and I said: “Sirs, you, and particularly father and mother, I call you all to witness …”

At these words one of the Sisters let down the curtain of the grille, and I saw that it was useless to continue. The nuns surrounded me and overwhelmed me with reproaches. I listened without saying a word. I was led into my cell and shut in under lock and key.

There, abandoned to my own reflections, I began to take courage again; I went over my actions in my mind and saw nothing to repent of. I perceived that, after the scandal I had caused, I could not possibly remain there long, and hoped they might not dare to send me to a convent again. I had no idea what would be done with me, but I could conceive nothing worse than becoming a nun despite oneself. For a long time I was left without any news. Those who used to bring me my food came in, put my dinner on the floor, and went away without a word. After a month had passed I was brought ordinary clothes and gave up those of the House. The Superior came in and told me to follow her. I followed her to the door of the convent. There I got into a carriage in which I found my mother quite alone. I sat down with my back to the horses and the carriage started. We remained opposite each other for some time in complete silence. I lowered my eyes and had not the courage to look at her. I do not know what came over me, but suddenly I threw myself at her feet and bent my head upon her knees. I did not speak, only sobbed and choked. She rebuffed me unfeelingly. I did not get up: blood came to my nose; I seized one of her hands despite her efforts. Then, watering her hand with my tears and the blood which was

flowing from my nose, and pressing my mouth against this hand, I kissed it and said to her: “You are still my mother: I am still your child.” She answered (repelling me still more roughly and snatching her hand from mine): “Get up, wretched girl, get up.” She put so much authority and strength into her voice that I felt I must escape her gaze.

My tears and the blood, streaming from my nose, ran along my arms, and I was quite wet before I noticed it. From something she said I judged that her dress had been soiled and that this displeased her. We arrived home, where I was immediately conducted to a little room that had been prepared for me. On the staircase I once more threw myself at her feet and held her back by her dress. Despite all this she would do no more for me than turn and dart at me an angry look with head, mouth, and eyes, which you may imagine more easily than I can describe.

I entered my new prison, where I remained six months. My food was brought to me, and I had a servant to look after me. I read, worked, wept, and sometimes sang – and so the days passed by. A secret feeling gave me strength – that I was free and that my lot, however hard, might change. But it was decided I should be a nun, and a nun I became.

So much inhumanity and obstinacy on the part of my parents finally confirmed me in my suspicions about my birth. I have never been able to find any other excuse for the way in which I was treated. My mother apparently feared that I should revert to the subject of the division of the property, ask for my part of it, and thus make a natural child share on equal terms with the legitimate offspring. But what had been only a conjecture was soon to become a certainty.

While I was locked up at home I practised but little the external forms of worship, though I was sent to confess on the eve of the great feasts. I told you I had the same Director as my mother. I talked to him and recounted all the hard treatment to which I had been subjected for three years. He knew it

already. Of my mother particularly I spoke with bitterness and resentment. This priest had embraced his calling late in life, and was a humane man. He listened to me quietly and said: “Pity your mother, my child, pity her rather than blame her. Her soul is good, and it is despite herself that she uses you thus.”

“Despite herself! And what constrains her, pray? Did she not bring me into the world? What difference is there between my sisters and me?”

“A great deal!”

“A great deal? I cannot understand your answer at all.…”

I was about to enter on a comparison between my sisters and myself when he stopped me, saying: “Come, come, inhumanity is not your parents’ failing. Try to be patient with your fate and at least make a virtue of that before God. I will see your mother, and you may be sure that I will use all my influence over her to help you.”

That “a great deal” with which he had answered me was a ray of light. I no longer doubted the truth of what I had surmised about my birth.

The following Saturday between five and half-past, as the day was closing in, the servant who waited on me came upstairs to me and said: “Your mother says you are to dress.” And an hour later: “Your mother wishes you to come downstairs with me.” I found a carriage at the door, into which the servant and I stepped, and I learned that we were going to the Feuillants to see Father Seraphim. He was waiting for us alone. The servant withdrew while I went into the parlour. I sat down, feeling upset and inquisitive about what he had to say to me. This is what he said:

“I am going to explain the secret of your parents’ severity towards you, and have obtained your mother’s permission to do so. You are sensible, intelligent, and strong-minded, and have also reached an age when you could be entrusted with a secret even if it did not concern you. A long time ago I exhorted your mother to reveal to you what you are only now to learn.

She could never bring herself to do it. It is hard for a mother to confess a grave fault to her child. You know her character. It is not of the kind which makes it easy to admit in this way a sort of humiliation. She hoped to be able to bring you round to her plans without sinking to this last resort. She was mistaken, and now regrets it. To-day she has come round to my opinion, and has charged me with the task of telling you that you are not the daughter of M. Simonin."

I immediately replied: "I suspected as much."

"Well then, consider seriously whether your mother can, without, or even with, the consent of your father, give you a position on an equality with those who are not your sisters, or whether she can admit to your father a fact about which he is already far too suspicious."

"But, sir, who is my father?"

"I am not in her confidence as to that. But it is only too certain that your sisters have been prodigiously favoured and that every possible precaution has been taken by marriage contracts, conversion of real into personal property, stipulations, trusts, and other means to reduce your share to nothing, against the event of your being one day able to apply to the law for restitution. If you lose your parents, you will find there is little for yourself. You refuse the offer of a convent – perhaps one day you will be sorry you are not there."

"That is impossible; I ask for nothing."

"You do not know what pain, labour, and indigence mean."

"I know at least the price of liberty, and the burden of a state for which one has no vocation."

"I have said what I had to say, it is for you to think it over."

He then got up.

"One question more, sir."

"As many as you like."

“Do my sisters know what you have told me?”

“No.”

“How could they then bring themselves to rob their sister, for such they think me?”

“Self-interest, self-interest! They would not otherwise have made their present admirable matches. Everyone looks after himself in this world, and I do not advise you to count on them if you come to lose your parents. You may be sure that the small portion you will have to share with them will be disputed down to the last halfpenny. They have large families, which will be an excellent excuse for reducing you to beggary. Besides, they can do nothing of themselves; their husbands do everything. Supposing they had any feelings of pity, the help which they could give you unknown to their husbands would become a source of domestic strife. I am always seeing such things: children being smuggled away because illegitimate or even when legitimate being assisted at the price of domestic peace. And, then, the bread of charity is very bitter. If you follow my advice, you will make it up with your parents; you will do everything your mother expects of you; you will enter into religion; you will be given a small allowance, with which you will live – if not happily, at any rate tolerably. Besides, I will not hide from you that the open way in which your mother has deserted you, her obstinacy in locking you up, and some other circumstances which I have now forgotten but once knew, have produced exactly the same effect on your father as on you. He was suspicious about your birth before, he is so no longer, and, though no confidences have been made, he is now quite certain you are only his child in as far as the law attributes all children to him who bears the title of husband. You are good and sensible. Think over what you have just learnt.”

I got up and began to cry. I saw that he himself was moved. He gently raised his eyes to Heaven and led me back. I picked up the servant who had

brought me; we got into the carriage and went home.

It was late. I lay meditating part of the night on what had been revealed to me; I was still meditating on it next day. I had no father. I had lost my mother owing to her scruples; precautions had been taken to prevent my asserting those legal rights to which my birth entitled me; a very cruel domestic captivity; no hope, no resource. Perhaps had everything been explained to me earlier, after my sisters had been established in life, and could I have been kept at home where a good many people called, some one might have been found for whom my character, mind, appearance, and talents would have been a sufficient dowry. This was still not out of the question, but the scandal I had caused at the convent made it harder. It was inconceivable that a girl between seventeen and eighteen years old should have gone such lengths without uncommon strength of character. Men praise this quality, but seem quite happy to do without it in the case of women they propose to marry. This, however, was a course to be attempted before thinking of any other. So I decided to speak about it to my mother. I asked her for an interview, which was granted.

It was winter. She was sitting in an arm-chair before the fire. Her countenance was severe, her gaze fixed, her features motionless. I went up to her, threw myself at her feet, and asked her pardon for all the wrong I had done.

“You can earn my pardon,” she replied, “by what you say to me now. Get up. Your father is away. You have heaps of time to explain yourself. You have seen Father Seraphim; you know who you are and what you can expect of me, unless indeed it be your intention to punish me all my life for a fault I have expiated but too fully. Well, what do you wish with me? What have you decided upon?”

“Mamma,” I answered, “I know that I have nothing and can expect nothing. I am far from wishing to add to your sorrows, whatever their

nature. Perhaps you would have found me more obedient to your wishes had you informed me earlier of circumstances which I could hardly have suspected. But at last I know; I know who I am, and must conduct myself accordingly. I am no longer surprised at the distinctions made between my sisters and myself. I recognize the justice of them and subscribe to them. But I am still your child. You have carried me in your bosom and I trust you will not forget it."

"May I be well punished," she added keenly, "if I did not confess to you as much as I possibly could."

"Well, Mamma," I said, "restore me your kindness and your presence. Restore me the love of him who thinks himself my father."

"He is almost as certain about your birth as we are," she added. "I never see you with him without hearing his reproaches, which he throws at me by ill-treating you. Do not expect from him the feelings of an affectionate father. And then, I will admit it, you recall to me such treachery, such odious ingratitude on the part of another that I cannot bear the thought of it. This man always comes between yourself and me. The thought of him revolts me, and the hate I owe him flows over on to you."

"What," I replied, "can I not hope that you and M. Simonin will treat me as a stranger, as an unknown girl, taken in out of pity?"

"Neither of us can do so. My child, stop poisoning my life. If you had no sisters, I should know what to do. But you have two, and both have large families. The passion that sustained me is long since dead, and conscience has reclaimed her rights."

"But he to whom I owe my life …"

"He is no more. He died without giving you two thoughts, and that is the least of his offences."

At this point her expression underwent a violent change, her eyes blazed, indignation seized upon her countenance. She wished to speak, but could no

longer articulate owing to the trembling of her lips. She was sitting down, and leant her head upon her hands to hide from me the violent emotions which were seething within her. She remained some time in this state, then got up and walked several times round the room without speaking a word. She stifled her tears till they scarcely flowed, and said:

"The monster. It was none of his doing that he did not smother you in my breast with all the misery he caused me. But God spared us both that the daughter might atone for the mother's sin. Child, you have nothing, and will never have anything; the little I can give you is so much smuggled from your sisters. Such are the consequences of folly. Still I hope I shall have nothing with which to reproach myself at death. I shall have earned your dowry out of my economies. I do not trade on my husband's easy-going nature, but every day I put aside what I from time to time receive from his generosity. I have sold all my jewels and obtained his permission to dispose freely of what I obtained for them. I was fond of cards, but have given them up; of the theatre, and go there no longer; of company, but I have gone into retirement; of luxury, and I have renounced it. If you enter into religion, as M. Simonin and myself desire, your dowry will be the fruit of my daily self-denial."

"But, Mamma," I said, "some well-to-do people still come here. Perhaps one may be found who, being satisfied with my appearance, will not even demand the savings which you intend for my establishment."

"That is no more to be thought of. The scandal you caused at the convent has undone you."

"Is there then no remedy?"

"None."

"But if I do not find a husband, must I be locked up in a convent?"

"Yes, unless you wish to go on making me miserable until my eyes are closed. For I must die at last. At that terrible moment your sisters will be

round my bed. How could I bear to see you among them? What would be the effect of your presence on me in those last moments? Daughter, for such you are despite myself, your sisters have obtained by right a name which is yours through crime; do not afflict a dying mother; let her descend peacefully to the tomb. Let her be able to say to herself, when about to appear before the Great Judge, that she has repaid her fault as far as she is able, and that she can flatter herself that after her death you will bring no trouble into her house and will not lay claim to rights that are not your own."

"Mamma," I said, "you can be at rest upon that point. Bring a lawyer to draw up an act of renunciation, and I will subscribe to whatever you like."

"That cannot be. A child cannot disinherit itself. It can only be disinherited as a punishment by justly angered parents. Should God call me to-morrow, tomorrow I should be reduced to the extremity of telling my husband everything, that we might take action in common. Do not expose me to an indiscretion, which would make me odious in his eyes and entail consequences dishonouring to you. If you survive me, you will remain without name, future, or estate. What ideas do you wish me to carry away with me at death? So I shall have to tell your father … what shall I tell him? That you are not his child! My daughter, if I had merely to throw myself at your feet to obtain from you … But you feel nothing. You have your father's inflexible soul.…"

At this moment M. Simonin came in and saw his wife's distress. He loved her and was a violent man. He stopped short, and turning a terrible look on me, said:

"Leave the room."

Had he been my father I should not have obeyed him, but he was not.

He added, speaking to the servant who let me out:

"Tell her not to appear again."

I shut myself up in my little prison and mused on what my mother had told me. I threw myself on my knees and prayed to God for inspiration. I prayed for a long time, and remained with my face glued to the ground. One hardly ever invokes the aid of Heaven save when one cannot steel one's own resolution; and it is very rare then that Heaven does not counsel obedience. Such was my decision. "They want me to be a nun; perhaps also it is the will of God. Very well, I will be one. Since I must be wretched, the scene of my unhappiness can hardly matter." I ordered the servant who waited on me to warn me when my father had gone out. The very next day I asked for an interview with my mother. She sent back word that she had promised M. Simonin not to see me, but that I could write to her with a pencil that was provided me. I wrote then on a piece of paper (this fatal paper has been found again and only too good use of it has been made).

"Mamma, I am sorry for all the sorrow I have caused. I ask your forgiveness and intend never to distress you again. Order me to do whatever you like. If it be your wish that I enter into religion I hope that it is also the will of God."

The servant took this letter and carried it to my mother. She came back a moment later and said to me in a voice of transport:

"If it needed only one word from you to make yourself and your parents happy, why have you put off saying it so long? I have never seen such an expression on the face of my master and mistress since I have been here. They used to quarrel about you unceasingly. Thank Heaven I shall now be spared that.…"

While she spoke to me I felt that I had just signed my death-warrant, and this foreboding, my lord, will come true if you abandon me. Several days passed without my having any news, when one morning about nine my door suddenly opened, and M. Simonin entered in dressing-gown and nightcap. His presence merely terrified me now that I had learnt he was not my father.

I got up and curtsied. I seemed to have two hearts. I could not think of my mother without affection and without wishing to cry. But it was quite different with M. Simonin. Certain it is that a father inspires a kind of feeling one has for no one else but him. One cannot know this, unless like me one finds oneself in the presence of one who has long borne, but has just lost, this august character. Others will never know it. When I passed from his presence into that of my mother, I seemed to myself another being. He said:

"Susan, do you recognize this note?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you written it of your own free will?"

I could only answer "Yes."

"Are you at least resolved to fulfil the promises contained in it?"

"I am."

"Have you a preference for any particular convent?"

"That is all one to me."

"Very well."

Such were my replies, but unluckily they were not written down. I was told nothing of what was happening for a whole fortnight, during which time they presumably approached various religious houses, who refused to receive me as a postulant owing to the scandal my first step had caused. They were less difficult at Longchamps, doubtless because it was hinted I was musical and had a good voice. The difficulty of the whole matter was greatly exaggerated as well as the favour that was shown me in accepting me into the House. I was even persuaded into writing to the Superior. I did not appreciate the consequences of this written testimony which was asked of me. They were apparently afraid that one day I might revolt against my vows and they wished an attestation in my own hand that these vows had been freely taken. Except for this motive how can this letter, which ought to

have remained in the hands of the Superior, have subsequently passed into those of my brothers-in-law? But let us close our eyes to all this, which shows M. Simonin in a light which is disagreeable to me. He is now dead.

I was conducted to Longchamps, in the company of my mother. I did not ask to say good-bye to M. Simonin. I confess the idea only occurred to me when we were half way there. I was expected, as the fame had spread both of my story and my talents; they said nothing about the first, but they were very anxious to see if their new acquisition was worth the trouble. After some conversation on many small matters (for, as you can well imagine, after all that had happened, there was no talk of God, or of vocation, or of the dangers of the world, or of the sweetness of the cloistered life, and no one risked any of these faded pieties, with which the first moments are usually filled), the Superior said to me: "You are a musician and have a voice; we have a harpsichord; if you like, we can go into our parlour." My soul was in anguish, but this was not the moment to manifest the repugnance I felt; my mother went first and I followed her, while the Superior came last, with some nuns attracted by curiosity. It was evening. Candles were brought, and I sat down at the harpsichord. I improvised for some time, as I sought for a piece of music in my head which was usually full of them, but could find nothing. But the Superior was pressing, and I sang without thinking of its aptness, by habit, because I knew the morsel well:

"Tristes apprêts, pâles flambeaux,

Jour plus affreux que les ténèbres."

[Sad preparations, pale torches, day more terrible than darkness.]

I do not know what effect it had, but they did not listen long. I was interrupted by their praises, which I was very surprised to have earned so quickly and easily. My mother then placed me in the hands of the Superior, gave me her own hand to kiss, and went off home.

So there I was in another religious house, a postulant, and to all appearances a postulant of my own free will. But you, my lord, who know everything that has happened so far, what will you think of it? For the most part these facts were not produced when I wished to break my vows, some because they were truths, which could not be proved, others because they would have served simply to make me odious. People would have seen in me merely an unnatural child, who blackened the memory of her relations in order to gain her liberty. Everything *against* me could be proved. The case *for* me could be neither produced nor proved. I did not even wish the doubts about my birth to be hinted to the judges. Several people not lawyers urged me to implicate the Director whom I had in common with my mother. This was impossible, and even had it been possible, I should not have allowed it. But while on this point, before I forget it, and in case you wish to make a point of it to help me, I think you might be silent about my music and knowledge of the harpsichord, unless indeed you are strongly of the opposite opinion. This would be enough to reveal who I am. Boasting about my talents does not go with the obscurity and security I seek. People in my position have not these accomplishments and so I must not have them either. If I have to leave the country I will fall back on them. Leave the country! But why, pray, should such a notion terrify me? Because I do not know where to go; because I am young and inexperienced; because I fear want, men, and vice; because I have always lived retired from the world, and because away from Paris I should feel lost. This is perhaps a mistaken view, but it is how I feel. You, my lord, can prevent my being in the position of not knowing where to go or what to do.

The Superiors at Longchamps, as at most religious houses, change every three years. A Madame de Moni was taking up her duties when I was brought into the House. I cannot speak too highly of her, though her kindness it was which ruined me. She was a sensible woman, who knew the

human heart, and indulgent, though none had less need to be so: we were all her children. She saw only those faults which she could not help perceiving and which were too important for her not to notice. I am quite disinterested in saying this, as I performed my duties with exactness, and she would do me the justice to say that I was guilty of no fault for which she might have had to punish or pardon me. Any predilection she showed to individuals was the reward of merit, so perhaps I ought not to add that she loved me dearly and that I was not the least among her favourites. I know what a compliment I am paying myself, a compliment greater than you can realize, who never knew her. “Favourite” is the name applied enviously by the other nuns to those whom the Superior loves best. If I have a fault to find with Mme de Moni it is the fact that she was too obviously affected by her love of virtue, piety, frankness, gentleness, talents, and honesty; though she knew perfectly well that those who could not lay claim to these qualities were on that account still further humiliated by her preferences. She had also the gift, perhaps more common in the convent than in the great world, of reading character. It was thus very rare for her to get fond of a nun whom she did not like at first sight. She quickly took a fancy to me, and I had immediately complete confidence in her. Woe to those whose confidence she could not gain without an effort! They had themselves to admit in such cases that they were bad and shiftless characters. She spoke to me of my adventure at Saint Mary’s, which I repeated to her, as to you, disguising nothing. I told her everything which I have just told you and forgot nothing which bore on my birth and troubles. She pitied me, comforted me, and bade me hope for a happier future.

Meanwhile my period as a postulant was finishing. The moment for taking the habit arrived and I took it. I went through my novitiate without disgust, and I pass rapidly over these two years as they brought no sorrow to me, save the secret feeling that I was advancing step by step towards

entering into a state for which I was not intended. Sometimes this feeling reasserted itself strongly, but at once I had recourse to my good Superior, who kissed me, encouraged my spiritual nature, argued her point of view forcefully, and always ended by saying: “And have not other conditions their thorns as well? We feel only our own. Come, child, let us kneel and pray.” Then she would prostrate herself and pray out loud, but with so much eloquence, unction, sweetness, elevation, and strength that one would have said the spirit of God was inspiring her. Her thoughts, expressions, and images penetrated the very depths of the heart. At first one listened, gradually one was swept along and united with her. The soul trembles and one shared her transports. She certainly intended no seduction, but such was certainly the consequence of her actions. One left her with a burning heart and with joy and ecstasy painted on the countenance. How sweet were the tears then shed. She herself for a long time took on the stamp of the impression which she made on us, an impression which did not pass away. This was not my experience alone but that of all the nuns. Some have said that they felt the need of her consolation growing in them like the need for some great pleasure – and I think that I only needed a little more experience of it to have felt the same.

I experienced, however, as the moment of my profession approached, so profound a feeling of melancholy that my Superior was put to a terrible trial. Her talent abandoned her, as she admitted to me frankly.

“I do not know,” she said, “what is going on within me; it seems to me that, when you come in, God retires and His spirit is silent. It is in vain that I excite myself, search for ideas, and seek to exalt my soul. I feel myself to be a commonplace and limited woman. I fear to speak.…”

“Ah! my Mother,” said I, “what a presentiment. Suppose it were God who made you mute.”

One day when I was feeling more uncertain and depressed than ever, I went into her cell. At first my presence overcame her. Apparently she read in my eyes and my whole appearance that the deep feeling which I carried in my bosom was beyond my control, and she did not wish to struggle without certainty of success. Still she understood the task and gradually warmed to it. As my grief grew weaker her enthusiasm increased. She suddenly threw herself on her knees, and I imitated her. She thought I was going to share her transports, as I hoped too. She pronounced a few words and then was suddenly silent. I waited in vain. She spoke no more, but got up and burst into tears, taking me by the hand and clasping me in her arms.

"Ah, dear child," she cried, "what a cruel effect you produce upon me! See what has happened: I am no longer inspired. I feel it to be so. Go, let God speak to you Himself, since He does not please to do so through my lips."

I cannot with certainty say what had been going on inside her; whether I had inspired in her a distrust of her own strength which could not be overcome, whether I had made her timid, or whether I really had destroyed her communion with Heaven: but the gift of consolation was no longer hers. On the eve of my profession, I went to see her and her melancholy equalled my own. I began to weep, and she also. I threw myself at her feet; she blessed me, raised me, kissed me, and sent me away, saying:

"I am tired of life, I wish to die, I asked God that I might not see this day, but such is not His will. Go, I will speak to your mother: I will pass the night in prayer, and you, pray too. But go to bed; I order it."

"Let me join you in prayer," I answered.

"I will allow it from nine to eleven, no longer. At half-past nine I shall begin to pray, and so will you. But at eleven you will let me pray alone and, yourself, get some sleep. I shall keep watch before God the rest of the night."

She wished to pray, but could not. While I was asleep this saintly woman went along the corridors, knocking at each door, woke the nuns, and made them go down noiselessly into the chapel. They all collected there; and when they were there she bade them address Heaven on my behalf. First they prayed in silence; then she extinguished the lights and all recited the *Miserere* together, except the Superior, who, prostrate at the foot of the altar, whipped herself cruelly, saying: "O God, if You have withdrawn from me through some fault which I have committed, grant me forgiveness. I do not ask You to restore to me the gift which You have taken from me, but that You should address Yourself to this innocent who sleeps, while I invoke You here for her – O God, speak to her, speak to her relatives and forgive me."

Next day she came early into my cell. I did not hear her, not being yet awake. She sat beside my bed, and lightly placed one of her hands upon my forehead. Distress, agitation, and grief kept passing in turn over her face, and it was in this state that she appeared to me when I opened my eyes. She said nothing of what had passed during the night. She only asked me if I had gone to bed early, and I replied:

"At the hour you told me."

If I had slept.

"Soundly."

"I expected as much. How are you?"

"Very well, Mother."

"Alas," she said to me, "I have never seen anyone enter into religion without being anxious about her. But I have never been so distressed about anyone as about you. I am so desirous that you should be happy."

"If you always love me I shall be."

"Ah! if that were all! You thought of nothing during the night?"

"No."

“And what is passing at this moment through your soul?”

“I am brutish and obey my fate without repugnance and without pleasure. I feel that necessity is dragging me on and I let myself go. Ah, I know none of that soft joy, of that flutter of the spirit, of that melancholy, of that soft anxiety which I have sometimes remarked in those who find themselves in my present state. I feel like an idiot and cannot even weep. They wish it, it must be so. Such is my only thought. But you do not say anything?”

“I did not come to talk to you, but to see you and to listen. I am expecting your mother. Try not to distress me. Let my feelings pile up in my soul. When it can hold no more, I shall leave you. I must be silent. I know myself. My nature has only one jet; still, it is violent, and I must not pour it over you. Lie back a moment yet, while I look at you. Speak only a few words to me, and let me take away what I have come to find. Then I shall go and God will do the rest.”

I was silent, lay back on my pillow, and offered her one of my hands, which she took. She seemed to muse and to muse deeply. She kept her eyes with difficulty closed. Sometimes she opened them, lifted them on high, and brought them back to me. She grew agitated: her soul filled with tumult, became calm and then grew agitated again. Truly this woman was born to be a prophetess. She had the appearance and the character of one. She was beautiful – but age, while weakening her features and delving its furrows in them, had in addition given dignity to her countenance. Her eyes were small, but they seemed either to look into herself or to look right through the things round her: and to unravel what was a great distance off, in the past and in the future. From time to time she squeezed my hand silently. She suddenly asked me the time.

“Almost six.”

“Good-bye, I am going away. They are coming to dress you. I do not wish to be there as it would distress me. I have now one care only, that in the early stages I may behave with moderation.”

She had hardly gone out when the Novice Mistress and my companions entered. They took off my religious habit and redressed me in the clothes of the world. This is a custom with which you are acquainted. I understood nothing of what was being said around me. I had become practically an automaton. I was aware of nothing, save that from time to time I had a kind of small convulsive fit. They told me what was to be done; and they were often obliged to repeat themselves as I understood nothing the first time. It was not that I was thinking about anything else, but that I was completely wrapt. My head was weary, as when one is overtaxed with thinking. Meanwhile the Superior was closeted with my mother. I never learned what happened at this interview, which was of great length. I was only told that when they separated my mother was so distressed that she could not find the door by which she had come in and that the Superior had gone out with her hands clasped and pressed against her forehead.

Meanwhile the bells were ringing. I came down and found only a small company collected. The sermon may have been good. I did not hear a word of it. They did with me what they would all that morning, which has been erased from my life, for the passage of time has never passed into my consciousness. I do not know what I did or what I said. No doubt I was questioned and no doubt I answered. I pronounced my vows, but cannot remember doing so, and I became a nun as unconsciously as I had become a Christian.

I did not take in the ceremony of my profession any more than that of my baptism – but there is this difference, that one confers grace and the other presupposes it. Well, my lord, though I did not protest at Longchamps and did at Saint Mary’s, do you think me the more committed for that? I appeal

to your judgment; I appeal to the judgment of God. I was so completely depressed that when some days afterwards I was told that it was my turn for service in the choir I did not understand what was being said. I asked if it was really the case that I had made my profession, and asked to see the signature to my vows. They had to support these proofs with the testimony of the whole community and that of some outsiders who had been invited to the ceremony. I addressed myself several times to the Superior and said:

"Is it true then?" and I always expected her to answer: "No, child, you are mistaken." Her reiterated assurances did not convince me, as it seemed impossible that I should remember nothing of what had happened during a whole day, so tumultuous and varied, so full of singular and striking incidents; not even the faces of those who had served me, nor that of the priest who had addressed me, nor of him who had received my vows. The change from the religious to the lay habit is the only thing which I remember. From that moment I was what is called physically alienated. Months passed before I recovered from this condition, and I attribute my complete forgetfulness of what happened to the length of this kind of convalescence. My case resembled that of people who have had a long illness, spoken sensibly, and received the sacraments, but on being restored to health can remember nothing about it. I have seen several examples of this in the House, and I have said to myself: "Presumably this is what happened to me the day I made my profession." But it remains to be ascertained if such actions are really done by man, and if, despite appearances, he has any part in them.

In the same year three important people in my life passed away – my father, or rather he who passed for such; he was old, had worked hard, and was snuffed out; my Mother Superior; and my mother.

The worthy nun felt her last hour approaching from afar. She condemned herself to silence, and had her bier carried into her room. Having lost all

capacity for sleep, she passed her days and nights in meditation and writing. She left behind her fifteen meditations which seem to me extremely beautiful. I have a copy of them. If at any time you are curious to see the notions which our last moments suggest I will show you them. They are called “The last moments of Sister de Moni.”

At the approach of death she had herself dressed and was stretched upon her bed. She received the sacraments and held a crucifix in her arms. It was night. The light of the torches lit up the melancholy scene. We surrounded her and burst into tears. Her cell was ringing with cries, when suddenly her eyes lit up with an unexpected brilliance. She lifted herself suddenly and spoke. Her voice was almost as strong as it had been when she was in her usual health. The gift which she had lost returned to her. She reproached us for our tears, which made us look as if we envied her her eternal happiness.

“My children, your grief misleads you. It is there, it is there,” she said, and pointing to heaven, “that I shall serve you. My eyes will always be looking down upon this House. I shall intercede for you and shall be heard. Come up, all of you, that I may kiss you, and receive my blessing and my last farewell.”

While pronouncing these last words this rare woman died, leaving behind her imperishable regrets. My mother died after a short journey which she had made to see one of her daughters later in the autumn. She had had worries, which had weakened her health. I have never found out the name of my father nor the story of my birth. The priest who had been our Director handed me a small parcel from her containing fifty pounds and a letter sewn up in a piece of linen. The letter was as follows:

“My child, it is not much, but my conscience does not let me dispose of a larger sum. It is what remains of the economies I have been able to save out of the little presents M. Simonin used to make me. Live holily, it is best, even for your happiness in this world. Pray for me. Your birth is the one

grave sin that I have committed. Help me to expiate it. And may God forgive me for having brought you into the world, out of consideration for the good works you will do there. Above all, do not trouble my family. And although you have not chosen as voluntarily as I could have wished the state you have embraced, shrink from changing it. Why have I not been shut up all my life in a convent? I should not be so troubled by the thought that I must in a moment submit to the terrible judgment of God. Consider, my child, that the fate of your mother in the other world will depend greatly on your conduct in this one. God, Who sees everything, will visit on me in His justice all the good and evil that you will do. Susan, ask nothing from your sisters. They are not in a position to help you. Hope for nothing from your father. He has gone before me; he has seen the great day and is expecting me. My presence will be less terrible for him than his for me. Farewell, once again. O, wretched mother! O, unhappy child! Your sisters have arrived. I am not pleased with them. They pounce on things and carry them off and have distressing quarrels about their rights before the eyes of their dying mother. When they approach my bed, I turn away on my other side. What can I hope to find in them? Two creatures in whom indigence has destroyed all natural feelings. They sigh after the little I am leaving behind me. They put indecent questions to the doctor and nurse, showing with what impatience they await the moment of my departure, which will put them in possession of everything round me. They suspected, I know not how, that I might have some money hidden between my mattresses. They left no stone unturned to make me get up and in this they were successful. Luckily the man to whom I entrusted this packet had come the day before and I had given it to him, as well as this letter, which he has written at my dictation. Burn the letter, and when you learn that I am no more – and that will not be long – have a mass said for me and renew your vows, for I wish you to remain for ever in religion. The idea of you in the world, young, without

anyone to support or help you, would be a final anguish in my last moments."

My father died on the 5th of January, my Superior at the end of the same month, and my mother on Christmas Day (old style).

The succession to Mother de Moni fell upon Sister Christine. But oh, my lord, what a difference there was between the two! You know by now what the first one was like. The second was mean in character, with a narrow intelligence, confused by superstition. She went in for innovating opinions and used to be closeted with Sulpicians and Jesuits. Also she had an aversion for all the favourites of her predecessor. In a moment the House was deep in disturbances, hatred, slanders, accusations, calumnies, and persecutions. We had to explain ourselves on points of theology which meant nothing to us, subscribe to formulas, and give ourselves over to singular practices. Mother de Moni disapproved of all bodily penance. Only twice in her life had she resorted to physical mortification, once on the eve of my profession and once on a like occasion. She said of these penances that they corrected no evil feeling and only ended in puffing people up. She liked her nuns to be well, healthy in body and serene in spirit. Her first step on taking over her duties was to collect all the hair belts and whips, and to prevent the nuns spoiling their food with ashes, or sleeping on the floor. They were to use none of these instruments of penance. Her successor sent each nun back her hair belt and whip and took away the Old and New Testaments. The favourites of the old reign are never the favourites of the new. I meant nothing to the present Superior (to say the least of it) simply because I had been dear to her predecessor. But I quickly made my lot worse by actions which you will call either imprudence or strength of character, according to the way you look at them.

First of all, I gave myself up to all the grief I felt at the loss of our first Superior. Then I praised her on all occasions and instituted between her and

our present governor comparisons not favourable to the latter. I painted the state of the House in the old days, and called to memory the peace we then enjoyed, her indulgence towards us, the food, both spiritual and temporal, which was then administered; and I exalted the virtues, the sentiments, and the character of Sister de Moni. Then I threw into the fire my hair belt and got rid of my whip. I lectured my friends on the subject and induced some to follow my example. Thirdly, I procured an Old and New Testament: fourthly, I refused to take sides in religious quarrels, and held on to the title of Christian, refusing to call myself a Jansenist or a Molinist. Fifthly, I held strictly to the rule of the House, neither more nor less. Consequently I would undertake no supererogatory actions, as I found those of obligation quite enough. I would play the organ only on feast days and sing only when I was of the choir. I would no longer permit my good nature and talents to be abused and become a daily drudge. I read and re-read our Constitution till I knew it by heart, and if I was given an order which was either not stated clearly in it or not stated at all, or seemed contrary to it, I refused firmly. I would take up the book and say: “These and these only are the engagements I have undertaken.”

My speeches gained me some adherents. The authority of the mistresses became in consequence very limited, and they could no longer dispose of us as though we were their slaves. Hardly a day passed without a scene. In uncertain cases my companions consulted me, and I was always for the rule and against tyranny. I soon had the appearance, and perhaps a little played the part, of a rebel. The Grand Vicars of the Archbishop were being continually called in. I appeared, defended myself, defended my companions; and never once was I condemned, such pains had I taken to have right on my side. It was impossible to attack me on the score of my duties, as I fulfilled them scrupulously. As for those little favours which a Superior can always either grant or refuse, I asked for none. I never

appeared in the parlour, and as for visits, as I knew nobody I received none. I had burned my hair belt and thrown away my whip, and advised others to do the same. I never wished to hear another word, good or bad, said of Molinism or Jansenism. When asked if I had submitted to the Constitution, I replied that I had submitted to the Church; if I had accepted the Bull – that I had accepted the Gospel. My cell was visited and my Old and New Testament discovered. Some indiscreet remarks had escaped me as to the suspicious friendships of some of the favourites – the Superior had long private interviews with a young ecclesiastic, and I divined both the real and the pretended reason for them. I overlooked nothing which could make me feared and hated, and so lead to my undoing, and in this I was completely successful. People no longer complained of me to my superiors, but concentrated on making my life difficult. The other nuns were forbidden to come near me, and I soon found myself alone. I had a few friends. It was suspected that these friends would secretly seek some compensations for the constraint imposed upon them, and that, as they could not talk to me by day, they would visit me at night or during the forbidden hours. Spies were set on me, and I was discovered first with one friend, then with another. This imprudence was made an excuse for everything and I was punished in the most barbarous manner: I was condemned for weeks together to assist at divine service on my knees, separated from the rest in the middle of the choir; to live on bread and water; to stay shut up in my cell; and to fulfil the vilest duties in the House. Those called my accomplices were scarcely better treated. When I could not be caught in a fault, faults were imputed to me. I was given incompatible orders and punished for not having carried them out. They put forward the hours of the services and the meals, and altered without telling me all the internal arrangements of the House, so that, with the best will in the world, I was always at fault and always punished. I was brave enough. But no courage can hold out against

desertion, solitude and persecution. Things reached such a point that to torment me became a game, the amusement of fifty persons in a league against me. It is impossible to go into their cruelty in every detail. I was prevented from sleeping, watching, or praying. One day several parts of my dress were stolen. Another day it would be my keys or my breviary. My keyhole would be blocked. Either I was prevented from doing anything properly or what I had done properly would be undone. Speeches and actions were attributed to me falsely. I was made responsible for everything and my life was a succession of faults, real or imaginary, with punishments to match.

My health could not hold out against trials so long and severe. I became depressed, gloomy, and melancholic. At first I went to seek strength and resignation at the foot of the altar, and I sometimes found it there. I floated between resignation and despair, sometimes submitting to all the cruelty of my fate, sometimes seeking to free myself by violent means. There was a deep well at the bottom of the garden. How often have I gone there! How often have I gazed into it! There was a stone seat beside it. How often have I sat there, my head leaning against the side of the well! How often, in the tumult of my ideas, have I got up suddenly and resolved to have done with my troubles! What was it held me back? Why did I then prefer to weep, cry out at the top of my voice, trample my veil beneath my feet, pull out my hair, and tear my face with my nails? If it was God Who prevented my destroying myself, why did He not prevent the rest as well?

I am going to tell you something that will very likely seem extraordinary to you, but which is none the less true: namely that I am certain my frequent visits to the well had been observed and that my cruel enemies flattered themselves that one day I should go through with a design which was boiling at the bottom of my heart. When I went in that direction, people affected to go off and be busy somewhere else. Several times I found the

door of the garden open at hours when it ought to be shut, and curiously enough on days when I had been specially persecuted. They had strained my violent temperament to breaking point and thought me mad. But the moment I thought I had divined that the means of departing this life were, so to speak, being offered to my despair, that I was being led by the hand to the well and that I should always find it ready to receive me, I thought no more about it. My mind went off in other directions: I hung about the corridors and measured the height of the windows. In the evening, when undressing, I tested vaguely the strength of my garters. Another day I refused to eat anything. I went down into the refectory and stood with my back to the wall, my hands hanging beside me, my eyes shut, and I touched none of the things that were served me. In this attitude I forgot myself so entirely that all the nuns had gone out without my noticing and I was left alone. They made a point of going out noiselessly and leaving me there so that I could be punished for failing to appear at the hour of exercise. How can I put it? I was disgusted with all methods of doing away with myself, because it seemed to me that my enemies, far from opposing me, were encouraging me. Apparently we do not enjoy being pushed out of the world, and perhaps I should no longer be here if they had made a pretence of restraining me. Perhaps by taking our life we try to reduce others to despair, and cling on to it if we think our departure will give pleasure, though naturally such states of mind are very complicated. To tell the truth, as far as I can recall my mentality beside the well, I think I cried out internally at the wretches who were making off so as to help me in my crime: “Come one step towards me, show the slightest wish to save me, come and try to stop me, and you may be sure you will arrive too late.” I certainly only lived because they wanted me to die. The passion for doing harm and tormenting other people wears itself out in the world, but not in the cloister.

Such was my state when, going over my past life, I thought of freeing myself from my vows. I mused on it at first quite casually. Alone, deserted, without anyone to assist me, how could I succeed in a project which is so difficult even with the help of friends? However, the idea soothed me: my mind grew more collected: I was more self-controlled. I avoided some punishments and was more patient with those I still received. The alteration was remarked and caused astonishment. Persecution of me stopped at once, as when you are pursued by a cowardly enemy and turn on him unexpectedly. One question, my lord, I should like to put you. Why is it that amid all the desperate thoughts that traverse the head of a desperate nun, that of setting the house on fire never occurs to her? I have never thought of doing so, nor others either, though it is the easiest thing in the world to put into execution. You have only, one day when the wind is high, to carry a flame into a loft, a wood-stack, or a corridor. No convents are ever burnt. Yet in these circumstances the doors fly open and everyone makes for safety. Do you think that perhaps one fears the danger to oneself and those dear to one, and disdains a succour one must share with those one hates? Such a notion is almost too complicated to be true.

If one thinks enough about a thing, one begins to appreciate the justice and even the possibility of it. And this is half the battle. It took me a fortnight, for I make up my mind quickly. And what did I decide to do? Why, to draw up a statement and pass it out for consultation. Neither actions were quite safe. Since the revolution in my mind I was scrutinized more attentively than ever. Eyes followed me everywhere. I did not take a step which was not observed, say a word which was not weighed. People used to come up to me and try to sound me, put me questions and affect pity and friendship. They dwelt on the past, blamed me but mildly or excused me altogether. Better conduct in the future was hoped for, and I was flattered with the prospect of milder treatment ahead. Meanwhile they used

to come into my cell every moment of the day and night with every kind of excuse; suddenly and secretly they would half open the curtains and then withdraw. I had formed the habit of going to bed dressed, and adopted another, that of writing my confession. On those days, which are marked down for us, I went and asked my Superior for ink and paper, which were not refused me. So I awaited the day for confessing, and while waiting drew up in my head what I had to put forward. It was a short version of what I have just written to you – but I used borrowed names. However, I made three blunders. The first was to tell my Superior that I had a great deal to write, so as to make this an excuse for asking for more than the usual allowance of paper. The second was to be so concentrated on my report as to forget about the confession. The third was only to remain at the Confessional a moment, as I had made no confession and was quite unprepared for this act of religion. All this was noticed and the deduction made that I had used the paper for reasons different to those given. But if it had not been used for my confession (and this indeed was evident) what had it been used for?

I was not aware that they were alarmed, still I felt that I should not be found with such an important document on me. First I thought of sewing it into my bolster or my mattresses, then of hiding it in my clothes, burying it in the garden, or throwing it into the fire. You can have no idea of what a hurry I was in to write it or how embarrassed I was when it was written. First I sealed it, then thrust it into my bosom and went off to the service, for which the bell was ringing. My movements revealed my anxiety; I was next to a nun who was fond of me. I had more than once seen her look at me with pity and shed tears: she never spoke to me but she certainly suffered for me. I resolved to risk everything and entrust her with my paper. At a moment in the orison, when all the nuns kneel, incline, and are, as it were, buried in their stalls, I gently pulled the paper from my bosom and handed it

to her behind my back. She took it and thrust it into hers. This was the most important of all the services she had done me, but she had done me many others. For months together, without compromising herself, she spent her time removing all the little obstacles which they set in the way of my going through with my duties, with the object of providing a reason for punishing me. She went to pull the bell or to answer it when necessary. She was always to be found where I ought to have been and I never knew about it.

I was well advised to do this. As we left the choir the Superior said to me: “Sister Susan, follow me.” I followed her, then she stopped in the corridor at another door and said: “This is now your cell. Sister Saint Jerome is going to occupy your former one.” I went in and she with me. We had both sat down without speaking, when a nun appeared with my clothes, which she laid on a chair, and the Superior said to me: “Sister Susan, undress and take this garment.” I obeyed in her presence, but she watched all my movements attentively. The Sister who had brought my clothes was at the door; she came back, carried away those which I had taken off and went out, followed by the Superior. No reason was given me for this proceeding and I did not ask for any. Meanwhile my cell had been thoroughly searched. My pillow and mattresses had been unsewn; they moved everything that could be or could ever have been moved. They went over my tracks, to the Confessional, to the chapel, in the garden, to the well, to the stone seat. I observed a part of their investigations and suspected the rest. They found nothing, but remained none the less convinced that there was something to be found. They continued to spy on me for several days, went wherever I went, looked everywhere, but all in vain. At last the Superior came to the conclusion that the truth could be learned from me alone. She came one day into my cell and said to me: “Sister Susan, you have your faults but untruthfulness is not one of them. Tell me the truth. What have you done with all that paper I gave you?”

“Madam, I have told you.”

“That is impossible, for you asked me for a great quantity and only passed a moment at the Confessional.”

“That is so.”

“What have you done with it, then?”

“What I told you.”

“Come! swear by the Holy Obedience which you have vowed to God that it is so, and in spite of appearances I will believe you.”

“You are not allowed to put me on oath for such a trifle nor I to swear one. I could not do so.”

“You are mistaken, Sister Susan, and you do not know to what you are exposing yourself. What have you done with all the paper I gave you?”

“I have told you.”

“Where is it?”

“I have no longer got it.”

“What have you done with it?”

“What one usually does with those sorts of writings which become useless after having served their purpose.”

“Swear to me by the Holy Obedience that it has all been used in writing your confession and that you have not got it any longer.”

“Madam, I repeat to you that this second thing is no more important than the first; I cannot swear.”

“Swear or …”

“I will *not* swear.”

“You will *not* swear?”

“No, Madam.”

“Then you are guilty.”

“And of what can I be guilty?”

“Of everything. There is nothing of which you are incapable. You have set out to praise my predecessor in order to humiliate me: to despise the usages which she had forbade, the laws which she had abolished and which I thought it right to re-establish: to cause an upheaval in our whole society and to infringe the rules: to divide the Sisters against each other: to neglect your duties: to force me to punish you and those you have seduced, which is what I most detest. I could have used severer methods against you: I have spared you. I thought you would recognize your faults, return to the spirit of your vocation and come back to me. You have not done so. Something wrong is going on in your mind. You have your plans. The interests of the House necessitate my knowing them, and know them I will. I can answer for that. Sister Susan, tell me the truth.”

“I have told it you.”

“I am going to leave you. Beware of my return.… I will take a chair and allow you yet another moment in which to make up your mind.… Your papers, if they still exist.…”

“I have no longer got them.”

“On your oath that they contained nothing but your confession.”

“I cannot swear.”

She remained silent for a moment, then went out and returned with four of her favourites. Their look was wild and furious. I threw myself at their feet and implored their pity. They all began crying out together:

“Show no pity, Madam; do not let her get round you. Let her give up her papers or go in peace.”

I clasped their knees one after the other and said to them, calling them by their names: “Sister Saint Agnes, Sister Saint Julia, what have I done to you? Why do you incite my Superior against me? Did I ever use you so? How often have I intervened on your behalf? You no longer remember? Yet you were in the wrong and I am not.”

The Superior, who remained quite motionless, looked at me and said:

“Give up your papers, wretched girl, or tell me what is in them.”

“Madam,” they said to her, “you have asked her often enough. You are too good. You do not know her. Hers is a disobedient spirit, which can only be tamed by extreme methods. It is her fault, not yours. So much the worse for her.”

“Mother,” I said, “I have done nothing to offend either God or man, I swear it.”

“That is not the oath I want.”

“She has written against us, against you, to the Grand Vicar, to the Archbishop. Heaven knows in what colours she may have painted the interior of our House, and people easily believe the worst. Madam, we must crush her if you do not wish her to crush us.”

The Superior added: “Sister Susan, see …”

I got up suddenly and said:

“Madam, I have seen everything. I see that I am destroying myself. But a moment sooner or later is not worth bothering about. Do what you will with me. Listen to their fury. Go through with your injustice.”

At the same moment I stretched out my arms to them. Her companions took hold of them. My veil was torn off and I was stripped without any shame. They found a small portrait of our former Superior on my heart. They seized hold of it. I implored them to let me kiss it once more, but they refused. They threw me a shift, took off my stockings, covered me with sack cloth, and led me down the corridors with my head and feet bare. I shrieked and called for help. But the bell had been rung to warn everyone to stay in. I called on Heaven. I fell on the ground and was dragged along. When I arrived at the foot of the staircase my feet and hands were bleeding and my legs all bruised. My condition would have melted the hardest heart. Meanwhile they opened with some large keys the door of a little dark

underground chamber, where I was thrown on to a mat half-rotten with damp. There I found a morsel of black bread and a bowl of water along with a little necessary crockery of coarse manufacture. The mat was rolled up at one end to form a pillow. On a block was a death's head and a wooden crucifix. My first impulse was to kill myself. I put my hands up to my throat. I tore my garment with my teeth. I uttered horrible shrieks. I howled like a wild beast. I was all over blood. I went on trying to kill myself till my strength gave out, which was fairly soon. I spent three days there, and thought I was there for life. Every morning one of my persecutors came and said to me:

"Obey your Superior and you shall leave this place."

"I have done nothing and do not know what is asked of me. Oh! Sister Saint Clement, there is a God."

On the third day, about nine o'clock in the evening, the door was opened by the nuns who had brought me there. After praising the kindness of the Superior they informed me that she had forgiven me and was going to let me go free.

"It is too late," I answered; "let me stay here. I want to die."

Meanwhile they had lifted me up and were dragging me after them. They led me back into my cell, where I found the Superior.

"I have consulted God about your fate: He has touched my heart. He wishes me to have pity on you and I obey Him. Go on your knees and ask His forgiveness."

I knelt down and said: "I ask Your forgiveness for the faults I have committed as You asked for forgiveness on the Cross for me."

"What arrogance!" they cried, "she compares herself to Jesus Christ and us to the Jews who crucified Him."

"Do not think about me," I answered, "but about yourselves and judge."

“That is not everything,” said the Superior; “swear by the Holy Obedience that you will never mention what has happened.”

“You must have acted very wrongly if you put me on oath not to mention it. No one, except your conscience, shall know anything; I swear it.”

“You swear?”

“Yes, I swear.”

On this they took off the garments they had given me and let me dress myself again on my own.

I had caught a chill and my condition became critical. My body was a mass of bruises. For several days I had had nothing but a few drops of water and a little bread. I certainly thought that this would be the last persecution I should have to undergo. But the strength which Nature has planted in young people is best gauged from the merely temporary effects of such violent shocks as this one. In a few days I was quite restored, and I discovered, on reappearing, that the whole community was convinced I had been ill. I took up again the observances of the House and my place in chapel. I had not forgotten my paper nor the young Sister to whom I had confided it. I was sure she had not abused the trust I had shown her in leaving it with her, but also that she had been alarmed by having to keep it. Several days after leaving prison, in the choir, at the same moment as when I had given it to her, that is to say as we were kneeling down, and, inclined one towards the other, were disappearing into our stalls, I felt my dress being gently pulled. I stretched out my hand and was given a note containing only these words:

“How much you have alarmed me, and what must I do with this cruel paper?”

After reading it, I rolled it up in my hand and swallowed it. This all happened at the beginning of Lent. The season was approaching when the desire to hear good singing brought to Longchamps all the good (and bad) society of Paris. I had a fine voice, which had hardly deteriorated. Religious

houses never neglect anything that can be of the slightest use to them. So I was shown some consideration and enjoyed rather more liberty. The Sisters to whom I gave singing lessons could talk with me without causing remark. She to whom I had confided my report was one of them. During the recreation hours which we passed in the garden I took her aside and made her sing, and while she sang I said to her:

"You know a great number of people, I nobody. I do not want you to compromise yourself. I would rather die here than expose you to the suspicion of having helped me. You would be lost yourself, I know, without saving me. And could I be saved by your ruin I would not pay such a price."

"Enough of that; what is to be done?"

"Be sure to pass that consultation secretly to some skilful lawyer, without his knowing from what House it comes; to get an answer, and hand it to me in chapel or elsewhere."

"By the way," she said, "what have you done with my note?"

"Do not be frightened, I have swallowed it."

"And do not be frightened yourself, either. I will think over your affairs."

You will observe, my lord, that I was singing while she spoke to me and that she was singing while I answered, and that our conversation was interrupted by snatches of the Chant. This young person, my lord, is still in the House: her happiness is in your hands. If what she has done for me were discovered, there is no torment to which she would not be exposed. I should not like to be the means of opening the dungeon door for her. I would rather go back into it myself. So burn these letters, my lord. Apart from the interest you have been willing to take in my lot, they contain nothing worth keeping.

(That is what I said to you then. But alas! she is no longer alive and I am alone.)

She was not long in fulfilling her promise and in informing me of it in the accustomed way. Holy Week arrived. There was a large congregation for our *tenebrae.* I sang sufficiently well to occasion an outburst of that scandalous applause which you offer to your actors in the theatre, but which should never be heard in the temples of the Lord, especially on those solemn, melancholy days when we celebrate the memory of His Son nailed to the Cross to expiate the sins of the human race. My young pupils were well prepared. Several had good voices, nearly all had expression and taste; it seemed to me that the public had listened to them with pleasure and that the community was satisfied with the result of my labours.

You know, my lord, that on Thursday the Holy Sacrament is removed from Its tabernacle to a special altar of repose, where It remains till Friday morning. This interval of time is passed in successive adoration by the House, who repair to the altar of repose one after the other or two by two. There is a notice which indicates to each nun her hour of adoration. And I was very happy to read on it, “Sister Saint Susan and Sister Saint Ursula, 2 to 3 a.m.”

I repaired to the altar of repose at the hour named. My companion was already there, and we took up our positions side by side on the steps of the altar. We prostrated ourselves together and adored God for half an hour. After this my young friend stretched out her hand to me and clasped my own, saying:

“We may never have another chance of talking so long and so freely together. God knows the constraint in which we live and will forgive us for sharing with Him a space of time that should be His entirely. I have not read your report. But it is not difficult to divine what it contains. I shall have the answer immediately. But suppose this answer justifies you in going on with your idea of breaking your vows, you must see that you will be obliged to confer with the lawyers.”

“That is true.”

“And that liberty will be essential for that.”

“That is also true.”

“And that if you perform your duties exactly, you will profit by the present disposition of our Superiors to obtain it?”

“I have thought of that.”

“You will perform them, then?”

“I will see.”

“One other thing. If your affair goes forward you will remain here, a prey to the fury of the whole community. Have you thought of the persecutions which await you?”

“They will not be greater than those which I have already experienced.”

“Of that I know nothing.”

“And excuse me, you are mistaken, First of all, they will not dare to tamper with my freedom.”

“Why so?”

“Because then I shall be protected by the law. They will have to produce me on occasions. I shall be, so to speak, half way between the world and the cloister. I shall have my mouth open and freedom to lodge complaints. I shall call on you all as witnesses. They will not dare to afford me grounds of legitimate complaint. They will be anxious not to damage their own case. I should ask nothing better than to be ill-treated. But they will not do it. You may be sure that their conduct will be just the opposite. They will appeal to me, they will represent to me all the harm I am doing to myself and to the House. You may be sure that they will only come to threats when they have seen gentleness and seduction are useless, and that they will never employ force.”

“But it is incredible that you feel so much aversion for a state, the duties of which you perform so easily and so exactly.”

“But indeed I do. I had it at birth and it will never leave me. I shall end by becoming a bad nun. That moment must be forestalled.”

“And suppose that you unfortunately fail?”

“I shall ask to change my House or I shall die here.”

“One suffers a long time before dying. Ah! my dear friend, what you are doing makes me shudder. I fear for you in either event. If you are relieved of your vows, what will happen to you? What will you do in the world? You have good looks, intelligence, and talents. But I am told that is all useless for a woman who remains virtuous, and virtuous I know you will always be.”

“You are fair to me but unfair to virtue. I have confidence in virtue. The rarer she is among men, the more she must be respected.”

“Men praise virtue but do nothing for her.”

“Still, virtue encourages me and supports me in the plan I have formed. Whatever people say, my morals will be respected. People will not be able to say of me, at any rate, as of most others, that I have left my state through unbridled passion. I see nobody. I know nobody. I ask to be free, because the sacrifice of my liberty has not been voluntary. Have you read my report?”

“No. I opened the packet you gave me because it was unaddressed and I thought it might be for me. But the first lines undeceived me and I did not continue. It was a good idea on your part to hand it over to me. A moment later it would have been found on you.… But the time has come when our station finishes. Let us go on our knees. Our successors should find us in the proper attitude. Ask God to enlighten you and guide your steps. I will unite my prayers and sighs with yours.”

My soul was somewhat relieved. My companion prayed upright. I prostrated myself, and my forehead was pressed to the bottom step of the altar, my arms were spread over the upper steps. I do not think I ever

addressed God with deeper thankfulness and fervour. My heart thumped violently. In an instant I forgot all my surroundings. I do not know how long I remained in that position or how long I might have remained in it. But I must have been a very touching spectacle for my companion and the two nuns who relieved us. When I got up I thought I was alone: I was mistaken, they were all three standing behind me, bathed in tears: they had not dared to interrupt me. They waited till I should emerge of myself from the state of transport and emanation in which they saw me. When I turned towards them my expression was no doubt imposing, if I may judge by the effect it produced on them and by what they also told me, that I resembled at that moment our former Superior when she used to comfort us, and that the sight of me had caused them all the same emotion. Had I had any leaning towards hypocrisy and fanaticism, or had I wished to play a part in the House, I do not doubt that I should have been successful. My soul catches fire, grows exalted, gets touched easily. And the good Superior said to me a hundred times as she kissed me, that no one had my capacity for loving God: that I had a soft heart, others hearts of stone. It was certain that I found it very easy to share her ecstasies and that when she was praying out loud, I could start speaking myself, follow the thread of her ideas, and come, as though by inspiration, on part of what she would have said herself. Others listened silently to her, or followed after her. But I interrupted her, or anticipated her, or spoke along with her. I preserved a very long time the impression I had received, and apparently I must have given something back to her. It was obvious when others had been talking to her: it was obvious when she had been talking to me. But what does all that signify when vocation is lacking? Our station finished, we gave up the place to our successors and before separating my young companion and I kissed each other tenderly.

The scene at the altar of repose made a stir in the House. You can add to that the success of the Good Friday *Tenebrae.* I sang, played the organ, and

elicited applause. Oh! you empty-headed nuns! It hardly needed any effort on my part to be reconciled to the whole community. They came half way to meet me, the Superior setting the example. Several people in society came to get to know me. That suited me too well for me to refuse. I saw the First President, Mme de Soubise, and a crowd of decent people; monks, priests, soldiers, magistrates, pious women, and women of the world, and among them that sort of addle-pate you call *red-heels*, and whom I soon sent about their business. I cultivated no acquaintance that anyone could find objectionable. I left such persons to those nuns who were not so particular.

I forgot to tell you that the first mark of favour shown me was to give me back my cell. I had the courage to ask back the little portrait of my former Superior, and they did not dare refuse it me. It returned to its old place on my heart and will remain there as long as I live. Every morning on getting up I first raised my soul to God and then kissed the portrait. When I wish to pray but find that my soul is unresponsive I detach it from my neck, place it in front of me, look at it, and am inspired by it. It is a great pity we never knew the sacred persons whose images are exposed to our veneration. Then they would make a far greater impression on us. They would not leave us, when we are at their feet or opposite them, as cold as they do.

I had an answer to my report. It was from M. Manouri, and was neither favourable nor the reverse. Before pronouncing on the subject a great number of points had to be cleared up, which was difficult without a meeting. So I said who I was and invited M. Manouri to Longchamps. People like him are too busy to get about easily; still, he came. We talked together for a very long time. We agreed on a method of correspondence which would ensure his questions reaching me and by which I should return my answers. For my part I employed all the time he was busy with the affair in disposing people in my favour, interesting them in my fate, and obtaining

protectors. I said who I was, told of my conduct in my first House, all my troubles at home, the sufferings inflicted on me in the convent, my protest at Saint Mary's, my stay at Longchamps, my taking the veil, my profession, and the cruelty with which I had been treated since the completion of my vows. People were sorry for me and offered to help me. I accepted all the goodwill shown me against the day when it might be useful without going into further details. Nothing came out in the House. I had obtained from Rome permission to appeal against my vows. The action was due to come on immediately, while everybody was still feeling quite safe about the whole matter. So I can leave you to imagine the surprise of my Superior when she was presented in the name of Sister Mary Susan Simonin with a protest against the latter's vows, with her request to abandon the religious habit, and to leave the cloister and to dispose of herself as she thought fit.

I had forseen opposition from several quarters: that of the laws, that of the religious House, that of my sisters and brothers-in-law, who would certainly take fright. They had had all the family property, and, once free, there would be large claims which I could make on them. I wrote to my sisters; I implored them to raise no obstacle to my departure. I appealed to their conscience or to my absence of choice when I took my vows. I offered to abandon, by a legal renunciation, all pretensions to any right of inheritance from my father and mother. I spared no effort to persuade them that this step of mine was dictated by neither self-interest nor passion. I made no impression at all on their feelings. Such legal renunciation as I proposed, if made while I was still in religion, became invalid on my changing my state. And they could not be certain that I should ratify it when free. And then, did it suit them to accept my proposals? Can one leave a sister without home or money? Or keep her property? What will the world say? If she comes to ask for bread, can we refuse it her? If she takes it into her head to marry, what sort of man will her husband be? Then suppose she

has children? No, we must leave no stone unturned to stop her. It might be most dangerous. So they said and so they acted.

Scarcely had the Superior received the legal form of my appeal when she came running into my cell.

"What! Sister Susan, you want to leave us?"

"Yes, Madam."

"And you are going to appeal against your vows?"

"Yes, Madam."

"You did not take them in all freedom?"

"No, Madam."

"And who put pressure on you?"

"Everybody."

"Your father?"

"Yes."

"Your mother?"

"She too."

"And why did you not appeal from the foot of the altar?"

"I was so little in control of myself that I cannot even remember having been present."

"How can you say that?"

"I am telling the truth."

"What! You did not hear the priest ask you: 'Sister Saint Susan Simonin, do you promise to God obedience, chastity, and poverty'?"

"I cannot remember it."

"You can only have answered yes."

"I remember nothing about it."

"Do you really imagine people will believe you?"

"Whether they believe me or not, it will be true just the same."

“Dear child, think of the abuses that would ensue if excuses like yours were accepted! You have taken a hasty step: you have let yourself be inveigled by a feeling of vengeance. You have taken to heart the chastisement you forced me to inflict on you. You thought that that would be a sufficient ground for breaking your vows. You are mistaken, that cannot be, before either God or man. Remember that perjury is the greatest of all crimes: that you have already committed it in your heart and that you are about to consummate it.”

“I shall not be a perjurer, I have sworn nothing.”

“Even if you have known bad treatment at the hands of some people, has it not been repaired?”

“It is not the bad treatment that has determined me.”

“What is it then?”

“Absence of vocation, absence of choice in my vows.”

“If you were not really called, if you acted under pressure, why did you not say so at the time?”

“And what good would that have done me?”

“Why did you not show the same strength as you had shown at Saint Mary’s?”

“Does our strength depend on ourselves? I was strong the first time. The second time I was out of my mind.”

“Why did you not call in a lawyer? Why did you not protest? You had twenty-four hours in which to retract.”

“What did I know of all these formalities? And had I known of them, was I in a position to make use of them? Suppose I had been in such a position, had I the power? What, Madam, did you not perceive that I was beside myself? If I call you as a witness you will not swear that I was sane?”

“I shall.”

“Very well, Madam. Then you will be the perjurer, not I.”

“My child, you are going to make a useless scandal. Return to your senses; I conjure you in the name of your own interests and in the interest of the House. These sort of affairs cannot go through without causing shameful discussion.”

“That will not be my fault.”

“Society is ill-natured and will make suppositions unfavourable to your mind, your heart, and your morals. They will think …”

“Whatever they like.”

“But talk to me frankly. If you have some secret dissatisfaction, of whatever nature, we will find a remedy.”

“I was, I am, and shall be all my life dissatisfied with my state.”

“Has the spirit of seduction, which is always round us, and seeking to destroy us, profited from the too great liberty recently allowed you to inspire in you some fatal inclination?”

“No, Madam. You know that I do not take an oath lightly. I call God to witness that my heart is innocent and has never known a shameful thought.”

“That is not conceivable.”

“And yet nothing can be easier to understand. Everyone has their own character and I have mine. You like the monastic life. I hate it. You have received from God the graces of your vocation. I possess none of them. You would be lost in the world. I am, and ever shall be, a bad nun.”

“But why? No one performs their duties better than you do.”

“But it is painful and against the grain.”

“It is all the more deserving then.”

“Nobody can know my deserts better than I do myself, Madam. I am forced to avow that though I submit to everything I deserve nothing. I am sick of being a hypocrite. While I do what saves others, I detest and damn myself. In a word, Madam, I accept no nuns as genuine except those who

are kept here by their desire for Retreat and who would remain here though there were neither grilles nor walls about them to restrain them. I am far from being among that number. My body, not my heart, is here. My heart is outside. And had I to choose between death and a perpetual cloister, I should not hesitate for a moment. Such are my feelings."

"What! You will feel no remorse when you leave this veil and habit which have consecrated you to Jesus Christ?"

"No, Madam, because I took them without reflection and without choice."

I answered with considerable self-restraint – for such were not the words which my heart proposed to me. It was saying: "Why am I not at this moment where I can tear them in pieces and throw them far from me?"

My answer, however, overwhelmed her. She grew pale; she wished to speak again, but her lips trembled. She did not know what further to say to me. I paced my cell with long strides and she cried out:

"O Heavens! What will our Sisters say? Oh, Jesus! throw on her a look of pity! Sister Saint Susan!"

"Madam."

"Your mind is made up then? You are going to dishonour us, make us the public butt, and ruin yourself?"

"I want to leave here."

"But if it is only the House which you dislike …"

"It is the House, it is my condition, it is the Monastic State. I do not wish to be shut up here or anywhere else."

"My child, you are possessed by the Devil. He it is who disturbs you, makes you talk so, and carries you off your feet. It is absolutely true. Consider the state you are in."

When I looked at myself I saw that my dress was in disorder, that my wimple had turned almost completely round, and that my veil had fallen

over my shoulders. I was irritated with the words of this ill-natured Superior who used with me only this false and softened tone. I said to her angrily:

"No, Madam. I have no more use for this garment. I have no more use …"

Meanwhile I tried to readjust my veil. My hands trembled: the more I tried to arrange, the more I deranged it. Losing patience, I seized it violently, tore it, threw it on the ground, and stood opposite my Superior with my forehead encircled by a headband and my hair loose. Meanwhile she walked forward and backwards, uncertain if she ought to stay, saying:

"Jesus, she is possessed! It is the absolute truth. She is possessed."

And the hypocrite signed herself with the cross of her rosary.

I quickly came to myself. I felt the impropriety of my condition and the imprudence of my words. I composed myself as well as I could, picked up my veil and put it on again, and then turning towards her said:

"Madam, I am neither mad nor possessed. I am ashamed of my violent behaviour and ask you to forgive me. But you can judge by it how little I am fitted for the convent life and how right I am to try and leave it, if I can."

She answered without listening, saying:

"What will everyone say? What will the Sisters say?"

"Madam," I answered, "you wish to avoid a scandal. There is a way out. I do not ask for my dowry back; I only ask for liberty. I do not suggest that you open the doors for me; only see to it to-morrow afternoon that they are insecurely watched. You will only notice that I have escaped when to remain longer in ignorance is impossible."

"Wretched girl, what are you daring to propose?"

"A plan that a good and wise Superior would adopt for all those to whom a convent is a prison: and for me a convent is a prison a thousand times more than those in which criminals are locked up. I must leave or perish.

Madam," I said in a firm voice and with an assured look, "listen to me. If the laws to which I appeal disappoint me in my expectations; and if pushed on by feelings of despair which I know all too thoroughly … you have a well … there are windows in the house … walls all round … clothes one can cut up … hands one can use …"

"Stop, wretched girl, you make me shudder. What! you could …"

"I could refuse my food when all other ways of finishing with my sorrow failed. One is free to take one's food and drink, or to go without them. If, after what I have just said, it turned out that I had the courage, and you know I am not without courage, and that it sometimes needs more courage to live than to die … picture yourself on the Day of Judgment and tell me which will seem to God the more guilty – the Superior or the nun. I do not ask back, and shall never ask back, anything from the House. Spare me from a crime, spare me from long remorse: let us come to an understanding."

"What are you thinking of, Sister Saint Susan; that I should fail in my first duties, lend my hands to crime, take part in sacrilege?"

"The real sacrilege, Madam, is that which I commit daily by profaning with contempt the sacred garments which I wear. Take them from me. I am not worthy of them. Let the rags of the poorest peasant be found for me in the village. Let the cloister-door be left ajar."

"And where will you go to be better off?"

"I do not know where I shall go. But one can only be badly off where God does not wish one to be, and God does not wish me to be here."

"But you possess absolutely nothing."

"That is so. But want is not what I fear the most."

"But fear the disorder want brings in her train."

"The past shall answer for the future to me. Had I been willing to listen to the voice of crime I should now be free. But if it suits me to leave the

House, I shall leave it. Either with your consent or by the authority of the law. You can take your choice.…"

The conversation had been a long one. When I thought over it I blushed for the indiscreet and ridiculous things I had said and done. But it was too late. The Superior was still exclaiming:

"What will the world say? What will the Sisters say?" when the bell summoning us to service separated us. She said to me as she left:

"Sister Saint Susan, you are going to chapel. Pray to God to touch you and restore to you the spirit of your vocation. Question your conscience, and believe what it tells you. It cannot but reproach you. You are dispensed from singing in the choir."

We went down almost together. When the service was over and the Sisters on the point of separating, she tapped on her breviary and stopped them.

"Sisters," she said, "I invite you all to throw yourselves at the step of the altar and implore God's pity for a nun whom He has abandoned, who has lost all taste for, and all the spirit of, religion, and is on the point of performing an act sacrilegious in the eyes of God and disgraceful in those of man."

I cannot describe the general surprise. In the twinkling of an eye each one, without moving, had run over her companions and endeavoured to deduce the guilty one from her embarrassment. They all prostrated themselves and obeyed in silence. After a considerable time the Prioress intoned the *Veni Creator* in a low voice, and all continued it in a low voice too. Then, after another moment of silence, the Prioress tapped on her pulpit and all went out.

I leave you to imagine the hum that arose in the community. "Who is it? Who isn't it? What has she done? What does she want to do?" The suspicions did not last long. My request had begun to make a stir in the

world: I received countless visits: some brought reproaches, others plans: I was approved by some and blamed by others. I had only one way of justifying myself in the eyes of everyone, which was to tell them of my parents' conduct. You can imagine the discretion I had to observe on this point. Only a few people remained sincerely attached to me besides M. Manouri, who was in charge of my affair, and in whom I could confide everything. When terrified by the tortures with which I was threatened, the dungeon, whither I had once been dragged, fixed itself on my imagination in all its horror. I knew the fury of nuns. I communicated my fears to M. Manouri, who said:

"You cannot avoid all suffering: you will suffer; you must have expected it. You must arm yourself with patience and support with the hope that it will have an end. As for the dungeon, I promise you that you will never return to it. That is my business.…"

And a few days later he produced an order on the Superior to produce me whenever she might be called upon to do so.

The next day, after service, I was once more recommended to the public prayers of the community. They all prayed in silence, and repeated in a low voice the hymn of the day before. The same ceremony the third day, with this difference, that I was ordered to place myself upright in the middle of the choir while they recited the prayers for the dying, the litanies of the saints with the refrain *Ora pro ea.* The fourth day was notable for a mummery, which revealed perfectly the strange character of the Superior. At the end of the service I was made to lie down on a bier in the middle of the choir. Candlesticks were placed beside me with a stoup of holy water. I was covered with a handkerchief and the funeral service was recited, after which each nun, as she went out, threw holy water over me, saying, *Requiescat in pace.* You must be familiar with the language of convents to understand the threat contained in these last words. Two nuns lifted off the

handkerchief, put out the candles, and left me soaked to the skin by the water with which they had maliciously sprinkled me. My clothes dried on me, and I had nothing into which to change. This piece of mortification was followed by another. The community assembled: I was looked at as though damned: my action was treated as apostasy. And all the nuns, on pain of disobedience, were forbidden to speak to me, to give me assistance, to go near me, or even to touch anything I had used. These orders were rigorously executed. Our corridors are narrow and in some places two people can hardly pass each other. If, while walking along, a nun came in the opposite direction she either retraced her steps or squashed up against the wall, holding on to her veil and dress for fear they should rub against me. If anything had to be handed by me to someone else, I put it on the ground and it was picked up with a cloth. If something had to be given me it was thrown at me. If anyone had the misfortune to touch me she thought herself contaminated and went to the Superior for confession and absolution. Flattery is said to be vile and low, but it becomes very cruel and ingenious when flatterers try to please by inventing means of giving pain. How often have I recalled the words of my heavenly Superior de Moni:

“Among all these creatures whom you see around me, so docile, innocent, and gentle, well, there is not one, no, my child, scarcely one whom I could not turn into a wild beast. Strange metamorphosis to which one is all the more subject the younger one enters into a convent and the less one knows of life. What I say astonishes you. God spare you from learning its truth. Sister Susan, the good nun is she who brings into the cloister some great fault to expiate.”

I was deprived of all my occupations. In chapel an empty stall was left on each side of the one I occupied. At refectory I was alone at a table. No one served me, and I was obliged to go into the kitchen to ask for my share. The first time the Sister who did the cooking cried out to me:

“Don’t come in, go further off.”

I obeyed her.

“What do you want?”

“My food.”

“Your food! You’re not fit to live.”

Sometimes I went away and passed the day without eating anything. Sometimes I insisted, and food was put by the door which they would have been ashamed to give to animals. I used to pick it up weeping, and go away. Sometimes I arrived last at the door of the choir and found it shut. I knelt down and waited till the end of the service. If they were in the garden I went back to my cell. Meanwhile I grew weaker from having taken so little food and from the bad quality of what was provided; still more from the misery caused by so many repeated marks of inhuman treatment. I felt that if I went on suffering without complaining I should never see the end of my case, so I determined to speak to the Superior. I was half dead with fright; still I went and tapped gently on the door. She opened it, and at the sight of me stepped back several yards, crying out:

“Apostate, go further off.”

I went further off.

“Further still.”

I went further still.

“What do you want?”

“Since neither God nor man have condemned me to death, I want you to give orders that I be allowed to live.”

“Live,” she said, repeating the words of the cook, “are you worthy to live?”

“Only God can know. But I warn you that if I am refused food I shall be forced to complain to those who have taken me under their protection. I am only here provisionally, till my fate and status are decided.”

“Go!” she said. “Do not soil me with your looks. I will see to it.”

I went away, and she slammed the door violently. Apparently she did give orders, but I was hardly better treated. The nuns made it a virtue to disobey her. They threw me the coarsest food, which they made still worse by mixing it with ashes and all sorts of filth.

Such was the life I led as long as my case lasted. The parlour was not entirely forbidden me. They could not deprive me of freedom to confer with my judges or my lawyer, though the latter was several times forced to employ threats to get at me. And then a Sister accompanied me. She complained if I spoke in a low voice, lost patience if I stayed too long, interrupted me, gave me the lie, contradicted me, repeated all my remarks to the Superior, changed their sense, filled them with venom, or even denied I had ever said them; anything you like. They went as far as robbing me, taking my things away, removing my chairs, coverlets, and mattresses. They gave me no more clean linen and tore my dress. I had almost to go without stockings and shoes. I had difficulty in obtaining water; I was several times obliged to go and get it myself at the well, the one of which I have spoken. They broke all my jugs and basins, and I was reduced to drinking the water as I drew it, without carrying it away. If I walked under the windows I was obliged to run away or be covered with all the dirt of the cells. Several Sisters spat in my face. I became hideously filthy. As they were alarmed at the complaints I might make to the Director, the confessional was forbidden me.

On a great feast day, Ascension Day I think, they blocked up my keyhole. I could not go to Mass, and should have probably missed all the other services had it not been for the visit of M. Manouri. They at first told him that they did not know what had become of me, that they no longer saw me, and that I did not perform any of the duties of a Christian. Meanwhile, after endless difficulty, I broke the lock and went to the door of the choir,

which I found locked, as was always the case when I was not among the first to arrive. I was lying on the ground, my head and back propped against one of the walls and my arms crossed over my chest, while the rest of my body was stretched out across the passage. The service ended and the nuns arrived to go out. The first stopped dead, and the rest came up behind her. The Superior suspected what the matter was and said:

"Walk over her. She is only a corpse."

Some obeyed, and stamped me under foot; others were less inhuman, but none dared stretch out a hand to lift me. While I was away they took from my cell my praying-desk, the portrait of our founders, my other pious images, and my crucifix. I soon had nothing but what I carried on my rosary, and that was not left me long. So I lived between four walls, in a room without a door or a chair, standing up or lying on a pallet, without the merest necessaries, forced to go out at night to relieve the calls of nature, and be accused the next morning of troubling the sleep of the House, of wandering about, and of losing my reason. As my cell door no longer shut, some nuns used to come in noisily all through the night, pull my bed about, break my windows, and occasion me all sorts of terror. The noise was heard on the floor above and the floor below, and those not in the plot said that something extraordinary was happening in my room: that they had heard melancholy voices, shrieks, the clanking of chains, and that I spoke with ghosts and evil spirits; that I must necessarily have made a pact with Satan, and that they themselves must leave my corridor. There are fools in every community; they are even the majority. They believed all that they were told, did not dare pass before my door, pictured me in their troubled imagination as hideous of feature, made the sign of the Cross in meeting me, and ran away, crying: "Satan, go away from me! O Lord, come to my help!" One of the youngest was at the end of the corridor; I went towards her and she could not avoid me. At first she turned her face towards the

wall, muttering with trembling voice: “Oh Lord! Oh Lord! Jesus! Maria!” Meanwhile I advanced towards her. When she felt me near her she covered her face with her hands through fear of seeing me, leapt towards me, hurled herself violently into my arms, and cried: “Pity! Pity! I am lost! Sister Susan, do not do me any harm! Sister Susan, have pity on me!” And as she spoke she fell half dead upon the floor. On hearing her cry, some Sisters ran up and carried her off. I cannot adequately describe how this adventure was travestied. The most criminal story possible was made of it. They said the Demon of impurity had seized hold of me, and attributed to me designs and actions which I dare not name, and strange desires which explained the evident disorder in which they found the young nun. Truly I am not a man, and do not know what two women can conceivably be imagined to do together, still less a single woman. And then as my bed had no curtains and they came at every moment into my room, you can see the absurdity of it for yourself, my lord. These women must certainly have thoroughly corrupt hearts, for all their external deportment, modest looks, and chaste expressions. At any rate, they know that these dishonourable actions can be done all alone, and I do not know it. And I have never understood of what I was being accused, and they expressed themselves so obscurely that I never knew how to answer them.

I should never be finished if I entered into the details of all I was made to suffer. Oh, my lord, if you have children, learn from my fate what you are preparing for them if you allow them to enter into religion without the signs of the strongest and most decided vocation. How unjust the world is! A child is allowed to dispose of its liberty at an age when it may not dispose of a shilling. Kill your daughter rather than imprison her in a cloister despite herself. Yes, I say, kill her! How often have I regretted that I was not stifled by my mother at birth. She would not then have been so cruel! Would you believe it, they took away my breviary and forbade me to say my prayers.

You can imagine that I did not obey them. Prayer, alas, was my only consolation. I raised my hands to heaven and cried aloud, and dared hope my prayers were heard by the only Being to see all my suffering. They listened at my door, and one day as I was addressing Him in the misery of my heart and calling on Him for help someone said:

"You appeal to God in vain: there is no more God for you. Die in despair and be damned."

Others added: "Amen on the apostate. Amen on her!"

But here is a trait that will seem to you more strange than any other. I know not if it were wickedness or illusion. It is this. Though I did nothing which pointed to a deranged mind, still less to a mind obsessed by the infernal spirit, they discussed among themselves whether I ought not to be exorcised; it was agreed by a majority vote that I had renounced my chrism and my baptism, that the demon resided in me and kept me away from the services of the Church. Another added that during certain prayers I ground my teeth and shuddered in chapel: that at the Elevation of the Holy Sacrament I twisted my arms about: another that I trampled Christ under foot; that I no longer wore my rosary (which had been stolen from me); that I uttered blasphemies which I dare not repeat to you. All agreed that something unnatural was happening inside me and that the Grand Vicar must be warned. This was done.

This Grand Vicar was a M. Hébert, an experienced old man, rough in manner, but just and enlightened. The disorder of our House had been described to him. Great disorder there certainly was, but if I was responsible for it, it was in all innocence. You can certainly imagine that in the report sent in to him nothing was omitted: my nocturnal wanderings, my absence from the choir, the tumult within me, what one had seen and another had heard, my aversion for holy things, my blasphemies, the obscene actions imputed to me. Everything was good enough for the case of the young nun.

They made anything they liked out of it. The accusations were so severe and so numerous that, for all his good sense, M. Hébert could not help being impressed and thinking that there must be a good deal in it. The matter appeared to him sufficiently important for him to look into it himself. His visit was announced, and he arrived sure enough, and accompanied by two young ecclesiastics who were attached to his person and who helped him in his painful duties.

Some little time before, during the night, I heard someone come into my room. I said nothing, and waited till I should be spoken to. I was called in a low, trembling voice.

"Sister Susan, are you asleep?"

"No, who is it?"

"Me."

"Who, you?"

"Your friend, who is dying of terror and risking ruin to give you advice that is perhaps useless. Listen! Tomorrow or the day after the Grand Vicar will visit us. You will be accused, so prepare your defence. Farewell. Be brave, and the Lord be with you!"

This said, she withdrew as lightly as a shadow. So you see everywhere, even in religious houses, are to be found compassionate souls that nothing can harden.

Meanwhile my case was followed with warmth. A crowd of people of both sexes, and all callings and conditions, whom I did not know, interested themselves in my fate and worked for me. You were of this number, and very likely the history of my case is better known to you than to myself. For, finally, I could no longer confer with M. Manouri. He was told I was ill, but suspected that he was being deceived, so he addressed himself to the Archbishop's office, where no one deigned to listen to him. It was announced that I was mad, or perhaps worse. Finally he returned to the

judges, insisted on the execution of the order, and signified to the Superior that she must produce me alive or dead when summoned to do so. The secular judges applied to the ecclesiastical judges. These no doubt felt the consequences that might result from the incident if the matter was not followed up, and it was apparently this that accelerated the visit of the Grand Vicar, for people in his position, tired by the continual squabbles in convents, are not generally in a hurry to get mixed up in them. They know by experience that their authority is always eluded and compromised.

I profited by my friend's warning to invoke the help of God, reassure my soul, and prepare my defence. I only asked Heaven the happiness to be impartially questioned and heard. I obtained it, but you shall hear at what a price. If it was to my interest to appear innocent and sensible to my judge, it was no less important to my Superior that I should seem to be ill-natured, obsessed by the devil, guilty, and mad. Thus, while I redoubled my fervour and my prayers, they redoubled their wickedness. They only gave me just enough food to prevent my dying of hunger; they wore me out with their persecutions. They multiplied terrors all round me, and took away all possibility of rest at night. They did everything that could destroy my health and distort my mind. Theirs was a refinement of cruelty which you cannot conceive. Judge of the rest by this example:

One day when I was leaving my cell to go to chapel or elsewhere I saw a pair of pincers on the ground lying across the corridor. I stooped down to pick them up and place them in such a way that the person who had dropped them should easily find them again. The bad light prevented my seeing that they were almost red-hot. I took hold of them, but before I dropped them they had removed all the skin off my hand. At night obstacles were placed at my feet or at the height of my head in places where I had to pass. I was wounded a hundred times and cannot say how I was not killed. I had no light to pick my way, and was obliged to go trembling with my

hands out before me. Broken glass was strewn under my feet. I was quite resolved to tell of all this, and more or less kept my word. I found the doors of the closets shut and was forced to go down several flights and run to the bottom of the garden, when indeed the door was open – when it was not …! Oh! my lord, what cruel creatures cloistered women are when they are sure they are seconding the Superior in her hatred and think they are serving God by driving you to despair. It was quite time the Archdeacon arrived; it was quite time my case was over.

Now comes the most terrible moment in my life. For you must realize, my lord, that I was completely ignorant as to the colours in which I had been painted to this ecclesiastic, and that he was coming in the expectation of seeing a girl possessed or counterfeiting possession. It was thought that only extreme terror could give me an appearance of being possessed, and this was what they devised to effect it.

On the day of his visit, early in the morning, the Superior came into my cell. She was accompanied by three Sisters. One brought a stoup of holy water, the second a crucifix, and the third some ropes. The Superior said to me in a loud and threatening voice:

“Get up … kneel down and commend your soul to God!”

“Madam,” I answered, “before I obey you, may I ask you what is going to happen to me, what you have decided to do to me, and what I must ask God?”

A cold sweat stood out all over my body. I trembled, and felt my knees give under me. I regarded her three inevitable companions with terror. They were standing in a row, with sombre visage, tight lips, and closed eyes. I thought from the silence which was observed that I had not been heard. I repeated the last words of my question, for I had not got the strength to repeat it all: so I said with a feeble, expiring voice:

“What grace must I ask of God?”

“Ask pardon for all the sins of your past life: speak to Him as though you were about to appear before Him.”

At these words I thought that they had taken counsel together and had resolved to be rid of me. I had certainly heard that such was the practice in certain religious houses, where they judged, condemned, and tortured. I do not think that this inhuman jurisdiction has been known in any convent. But then I had not believed possible so many things which had come to pass just the same! At this thought of approaching death I wanted to scream, but my mouth was open and no sound came. I held out my pleading arms to the Superior and my fainting body fell back. I fell, but the fall gave me no pain. In these moments of trance, when strength leaves, the limbs escape from control, and fall huddled, so to speak, one upon the other, and Nature being unable to support herself any longer, seems to try and fade softly away. I lost all consciousness and feeling. I only heard all round me the confused and distant voices. I distinguished nothing but a prolonged ringing, and I cannot say whether this was the sound of the voices or merely a ringing in my ears. I do not know how long I remained in this condition, but I was dragged out of it by a sudden coldness which caused me a slight convulsion and drew from me a deep sigh. I was drenched in water, which flowed from my clothes on to the ground. It was the holy water from a large stoup which had been poured over my body. I was lying on the ground stretched in this water, my head propped up against the wall, my mouth partly open, my eyes half dead and shut. I tried to open them and look round, but I seemed enveloped in a thick air, across which I only half saw floating garments and tried vainly to attach myself to them. I made an effort with the arm on which I was not leaning. I wanted to raise it, but found it too heavy. My extreme weakness grew slowly less; I raised myself and propped my back against the wall. I had my two hands in the water and my head bent over my breast. I uttered an inarticulate cry, stifled and feeble. The women looked at

me with an expression of doom and inflexibility, which removed from me the courage to appeal to them.

The Superior said: “Put her upright.”

They took me under the arms and stood me up. She added: “Since she will not commend herself to God, so much the worse for her. You know what you have to do, go through with it.” I thought that the ropes which had been brought were to be used for strangling me. I looked at them, my eyes filled with tears; I asked for the crucifix to kiss and it was refused me. I asked for the ropes to kiss and they were given me. I leant forward, took the scapular of my Superior, kissed it, and said:

“Lord, have pity on me! Lord, have pity on me! Sisters, try not to make me suffer.” And I presented my neck. I cannot tell you what happened to me nor what they did to me. Certainly those who are led out to execution (and I thought I was one of them) are dead before being killed. I found myself on the pallet which served for my bed, my arms tied behind my back, and seated with a great iron crucifix on my knees.…

My lord, I can see from here the suffering I cause you, but you wanted to know if I am a little deserving of the compassion which I expect from you.

Then it was that I felt the superiority of the Christian religion to all the other religions of the world. How profound was the wisdom in what blind philosophy calls the Madness of the Cross. In the state in which I was, what help could I have had from the image of a legislator, happy and acclaimed. I saw Him innocent, with His side pierced, His forehead crowned with thorns, His hands and feet pierced with nails, and expiring in agony. I said to myself: “There is my Lord and yet I dare complain.” I clung fast to this notion and felt a rebirth of comfort in my heart. I perceived the vanity of life and how lucky I was to lose it before my faults had had time to multiply. Meanwhile I counted up the years of my life. I discovered I was barely twenty and sighed. I was too weak, too crushed, for my spirit to be

able to rise above the terror of death. In good health I could have shown, I think, a braver resolution.

Meanwhile the Superior and her satellites returned, and they perceived that my presence of mind was greater than they had expected or desired. They raised me, a veil was put over my face, two of them took me under the arms, the third pushed me from behind, and the Superior bade me walk. I went, not knowing whither, but thinking it was to my death, and I said: "Lord, have pity upon me! Lord, give me strength! Lord, do not abandon me! Lord, pardon me if I have offended you!"

I arrived inside the chapel. The Grand Vicar had celebrated Mass there. The community was assembled. I forgot to tell you that while I was at the door the three nuns who were leading me squeezed me and pushed me violently forward: they created the effect of having difficulty with me. One dragged me along by the arms while the others held me back from behind, which made me look as if I had resisted and did not wish to go into the chapel, though this was not in the least the case. I was led to the steps of the altar; I could scarce stand up. They pulled me by the knees as if I were refusing to go along with them; they held me there as though I were trying to escape. The *Veni Creator* was sung, the Holy Sacrament exposed, Benediction given. At the moment of Benediction when we bow in veneration those who were holding my arm bent me as though by force while the others held me up by putting their hands on my shoulders. I felt them all acting in this manner but I could not see the point of it: all became clear in the end.

After Benediction the Grand Vicar took off his chasuble, robed himself only in his alb and stole, and advanced towards the steps of the altar where I was kneeling. He was between the ecclesiastics, his back turned towards the altar, on which the Holy Sacrament was exposed, and looking towards me. He came up to me and said:

“Sister Susan, get up.”

The Sisters who held me raised me roughly, others surrounded me and hugged me by the middle of the body as if they were afraid I should escape.

He added: “Untie her.”

They did not obey him, and affected to see inconvenience or even danger in letting me go free. But I have said that the man was rough. He repeated in a strong, hard voice:

“Untie her.”

They obeyed.

My hands were scarcely free when I uttered a melancholy piercing wail, which made him lose colour. The hypocritical nuns, who were coming close to me, withdrew as though in terror.

He pulled himself together; the Sisters returned, pretending to tremble. I remained motionless and he said:

“What is the matter with you?”

I answered merely by showing him my two arms. The rope with which they had garrotted me had sunk almost entirely into the flesh. And it had gone violet with the blood not circulating and being forced from its proper channels.

He realized that my wail was caused by the sudden pain caused by the blood resuming its normal course.

He said: “Let her veil be removed.”

It had been sewn in different places without my having perceived it, and much confusion and violence was introduced into the business of removing it, where none would have been necessary had it not been specially intended. The priest must at all cost see me obsessed, possessed, or mad. Meanwhile by dint of pulling, the thread broke in some places, my veil or habit were torn in others, and I could at last be seen.

My face is an interesting one. Deep grief had spoilt its beauty but taken away none of its character. I have an appealing voice: you feel that my expression is a truthful one. This combination of qualities aroused a strong feeling of pity in the young acolytes of the Archdeacon. For his part he was unmoved by such feelings. Fair-minded, but not sensitive, he was one of those who are, rather unhappily for themselves, born to practise virtue without getting any pleasure out of it. They do good, just as they reason, from love of order. He took the sleeve of his stole, and laying it on my head, said:

"Sister Susan, do you believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost?"

I answered: "I do."

"Do you believe in our Mother Church?"

"I do."

"Do you renounce Satan and all his works?"

Instead of answering I took a sudden step forward and uttered a loud cry, while the end of his stole slipped from my head. He was distressed and his companions lost colour. Some of the Sisters ran away, while others who were in their stalls left them in the greatest tumult. He made a sign that they should keep quiet. However, he looked at me and expected something extraordinary to happen. I reassured him by saying: "It is nothing, sir. One of the nuns pricked me sharply with something pointed," and, raising my eyes and hands to Heaven, I added, bursting into a flood of tears:

"They wounded me at the moment you asked me if I renounced Satan and all his pomps, and I well see why.…"

All protested, by the mouth of the Superior, that I had not been touched.

The Archdeacon put the end of the stole back on my head: the nuns began to come up again, but he signed to them to withdraw. He asked me again if I renounced Satan and his works and I answered firmly: "I

renounce them, I renounce them." He had an image of Christ brought and presented it to me to be kissed. I kissed it on the feet, the hands, and the wound in the side. He ordered me to adore it in a loud voice. I laid it on the ground and said on my knees: "Oh, Lord my Saviour, Who died on the Cross for my sins, and for those of the human race, I adore You. Let me profit by all the torments You have suffered. Let a drop of blood that You shed fall on me that I may be purified. Forgive me, O Lord, as I forgive all my enemies."

He then said, "Make an act of faith" … and I made one.

"Make an act of love" … and I made one.

"Make an act of hope" … and I made one.

"Make an act of charity" … and I made one.

I do not remember in what terms they were conceived, but I think they must have been pathetic, for I called forth sobs from some of the nuns, the two ecclesiastics wept copiously, and the Archdeacon, in astonishment, asked where I had found the prayers I had just recited.

I answered: "In the bottom of my heart. They are my thoughts and feelings. I swear by God, Who hears us everywhere and Who is present on this altar, I am a Christian; I am innocent. If I have committed any sins God alone knows them, and He alone has the right to ask for an account of them and to punish them."

At these words he cast a terrible look at the Superior. The rest of the ceremony drew to an end, a ceremony in which God had been insulted, the most sacred things profaned, and the minister of the Church made ridiculous. The nuns withdrew, save the Superior, who remained with me and the young ecclesiastics.

The Archdeacon seated himself, and taking the hostile report which had been drawn up, read it out loud, and questioned me as to the articles which it contained.

“Why,” he said, “do you never confess?”

“Because I am prevented.”

“Why do you never draw near the Sacraments?”

“Because I am prevented.”

“Why are you never present at the Mass or other divine services?”

“Because I am prevented.”

The Superior tried to say something, but he said to her in his rough voice:

“Madam, be silent. Why do you leave your cell at night?”

“Because I have been deprived of my water, my jug, and the articles most essential for the calls of Nature.”

“Why are people always hearing a noise in your dormitory and cell?”

“Because some nuns spend their time preventing my sleeping.”

The Superior again wanted to say something, and he said a second time:

“Madam, I have already told you to be silent. You will answer when I question you. What is this about a nun who was snatched from your arms and discovered stretched across the floor of the corridor?”

“It came from her having been inspired with terror of me.”

“Is she a friend of yours?”

“No, sir.”

“You have never gone into her cell?”

“Never.”

“You have never done anything indecent with her or anyone else?”

“Never.”

“Why have they bound you?”

“I do not know.”

“Why does your cell not shut?”

“Because I broke the lock.”

“Why did you break it?”

“To open the door and go to Divine Service on Ascension Day.”

“So you were present in church that day?”

“Yes, sir.”

The Superior broke in:

“Sir, it is not true. The whole community …”

I interrupted her … “will bear witness that the door of the choir was shut, that they found me prostrated at the door, that you ordered them to walk over my body and that some did so. But I forgive them, Madam, and you as well for giving the order. I am not here to accuse anybody but to defend myself.”

“Why have you got neither rosary nor crucifix?”

“They have been taken from me.”

“Where is your breviary?”

“It has been taken from me.”

“How then do you say your prayers?”

“I say my prayers with my heart and spirit, although I have been forbidden to do so.”

“Who forbade you?”

“Madam.…”

The Superior was going to speak again.

“Madam,” he said, “is it true or false that you have forbidden her to say her prayers? Answer Yes or No.”

“I thought, and I was right in thinking …”

“That is not the question. Did you forbid her to say her prayers? Yes or No?”

“Yes, I forbade her, but …”

She was going to go on.

“But!” riposted the Archdeacon, “but! … Sister Susan, why are your feet bare?”

“Because I am given neither stockings nor shoes.”

“Why are your linen and clothes in this old and filthy condition?”

“Because I have been refused clean linen for more than three months and am compelled to go to bed in my clothes.”

“Why do you go to bed in your clothes?”

“Because I have neither curtains, mattresses, coverlets, sheets, nor night clothes.”

“Why have you not got any?”

“They have all been taken from me.”

“Are you given food?”

“I ask to be.”

“Then you are not?”

I remained silent and he added:

“It is incredible that you would have been so severely treated unless you had done something to deserve it.”

“My fault is that I have no call to religion and that I am appealing against vows which were not freely consented.”

“That is for the laws to decide, and whatever their decision you must perform the duties of the religious life while you are waiting.”

“No one, sir, is more exact than I.”

“You must share in the lot of all your companions.”

“That is all I ask.”

“You lodge no complaint then against anybody?”

“No, sir. I have told you so. I have not come to accuse anybody but to defend myself.”

“Go then.”

“Where must I go?”

“To your cell.”

I took several paces, then returned and prostrated myself at the feet of the Superior and the Archdeacon.

“Well,” he said, “what is it?”

I said, as I showed him my head, wounded in several places, my feet bleeding, my arms livid and fleshless, my dress filthy and torn:

“You see!”

I hear you, my lord, and I hear the majority of those who read these Memoirs saying: They are not credible, such multiplied, variegated, and continuous horrors! A succession of such exquisite atrocities conceived in the souls of nuns. I agree; still, it is true, and may Heaven, whom I call to witness, judge me in all its rigour and condemn me to eternal fire if I have allowed calumny to tarnish a single line with the faintest shadow. Though I have for long known how keen a spur to natural perversity can be the aversion of a Superior, above all when perversity can make a virtue of what it does and can applaud and boast of its crimes, anger must not prevent my being just. The more I think over it the surer I am that what happened to me never happened before and will very likely never happen again. Once (and pray to God it was for the first and last time) it pleased Providence, Whose ways are unknown to us, to collect on one unfortunate head the whole mass of cruelties, divided, according to His inscrutable decrees, among the infinite multitude of unfortunate girls who had preceded her in the cloister and who are in turn to succeed her. I have suffered, suffered greatly. But the fate of my persecutors appears, and has always appeared, to me more pitiable than my own. I would rather die, I would always have rather died than surrender my part in order to take up theirs. My ills will come to an end. I hope much from your kindness. Memory, shame, and remorse for their crime will be with them till their last hour. They accuse themselves already, do not doubt it, and they will accuse themselves all their life and terror will go down with them to the tomb. Meanwhile, my lord, my present

situation is deplorable, my life is a burden to me! I am a woman with the weak nature of my sex. God may abandon me! I feel I have neither the strength nor the courage to bear what I have borne much longer. My lord, take care lest the fatal moment returns. Though you wore out your eyes to weep over my fate, though you were torn by remorse, that would not rescue me from the abyss in which I should find myself. The abyss would be closed for ever over a desperate girl.

"Go," said the Archdeacon to me.

One of the ecclesiastics gave me his hand to help me up, and the Archdeacon added: "I have questioned you. I shall now question your Superior, and I shall not leave here till order has been re-established."

I withdrew. I found all the rest of the House much alarmed. All the nuns were at the door of their cells talking across the corridor. As soon as I appeared they withdrew and there was a noise of doors slamming one after the other. I went back into my cell and fell on my knees against the wall, praying God to notice the moderation with which I had spoken to the Archdeacon and to make him know my innocence and the truth.

I was at my prayers when the Archdeacon and his two companions appeared in my cell. I told you that I had no carpet, no chair, no praying-desk, no curtains, no mattress, no coverlets, no sheets, no jug and basin, no door which shut, and hardly a pane of glass in the windows. I rose from my knees. The Archdeacon stopped short and, turning his eyes angrily on the Superior, said:

"Well, Madam!"

She answered: "I knew nothing about it."

"You knew nothing about it? You are a liar. Has a single day passed without your coming here, and was it not from here that you came down to me? … Speak, Sister Susan, has Madam not been here to-day?"

I returned no answer, and he did not insist. But the young ecclesiastics dropped their arms, lowered their heads, and fixed their eyes on the ground, thus sufficiently revealing their pain and surprise. They all went out, and I heard the Archdeacon saying to the Superior in the corridor:

"You are unworthy of your functions. You deserve to be deposed, and I shall complain to Monsignor. All this disorder is to be repaired before I leave." And continuing to walk about and shake his head, he added: "It is horrible! Christians! Nuns! Human beings! It is horrible!"

From that moment I heard no more about the matter. But I was given linen, other clothes, curtains, sheets, coverlets, basin, my breviary, my books of piety, my rosary, my crucifix, panes of glass, in a word everything that made my condition similar to that of the other nuns. The freedom of the parlour was also restored to me, but only for my affairs.

They were going badly. M. Manouri published a first Report which created but little attention. There was too much wit in it, not enough pathos, and hardly any reasoning. Still, it would be wrong to blame this skilful advocate too much. I was insistent that he should not attack the reputation of my parents: I wanted him to spare the state of religion, and above all the reputation of my House. I did not wish him to paint in too odious colours my brothers-in-law and sisters. I had only my first protest in my favour, solemn to be sure, but made in another convent and not renewed since. When one puts such strict limits to one's own defence and has to do with opponents who put no limits to theirs, who crush the just and the unjust under foot, who affirm and deny with equal impudence, and blush neither at imputations, suspicions, slander, nor calumny, it is difficult to carry the day, especially before tribunals whose familiarity and boredom with their work hardly permit them to examine the most important matters thoroughly, and where pleadings like mine are always regarded unfavourably by public men, who are afraid that if one nun petitions successfully against her vows

an infinity of others will follow her example. People have a secret feeling that if the doors of these prisons are allowed to fall in favour of one wretched girl, a host of others will rush forward and try to force them. People try to discourage us and to make us all resign ourselves to our lot by making us despair of a change. But it seems to me that in a well-governed state the procedure would be to the contrary. One would enter with difficulty into religion and leave it easily. And why not add this case to a number of others in which the least breach of a formality destroys the whole procedure, though it might be quite a fair one? Are convents then so necessary to the constitution of a state? Did Jesus Christ institute monks and nuns? Can the Church not possibly get on without them? What need has the Bridegroom of so many foolish virgins? Or the human race of so many victims? Will men never feel the necessity for narrowing the mouths of these gulfs, into which future generations will sink to perdition? Are all the regulation prayers one repeats there worth one obol given in pity to the poor? Does God, Who made man a social animal, approve of his barring himself from the world? Can God, Who made man so inconstant and so fragile, approve the rashness of his vows? Can these vows, which go against the whole grain of our nature, ever be properly observed except by a few ill-constituted creatures in whom the germs of passion are withered and whom we should properly class among the monsters did our knowledge permit us to know as easily or as well the internal as the external structure of man? Can our animal instincts be suspended by the gloomy ceremonies observed at the donning of the habit or at the moment of profession when a man or woman is consecrated to monasticism and misery? Do not they rather make themselves felt in the silent, confined, and lazy life of a convent with a violence unknown to people in the world, who are swept on by a thousand distractions? Where is it that we see imaginations obsessed by impure spectres which follow them about and terrify them? Where is it that we see

that profound boredom, that pallor, that thinness, all those symptoms of a languishing and failing nature? Where is it that nights are troubled with wailing and days made wet with causeless tears and preceded by a melancholy to which no reason can be assigned? Where is it that Nature, revolted by a constraint for which she is not intended, breaks down the obstacles that oppose her, goes mad, and throws the whole animal system into a disorder for which there is no remedy? In what place have disappointment and ill-humour crushed all social qualities? Where is it that there is neither father, nor brother, nor sister, nor relative, nor friend? Where is it that man, thinking he is but a momentary and passing being, despises all the softest ties of this world and treats them as a traveller treats the things he meets in his path, attaching to them no significance? Where is the dwelling-place of hatred, nausea, and the vapours? Where is the home of servitude and despotism? Where are the hates that never die? Where are the passions nurtured in silence? Where is the home of cruelty and inquisitiveness?

"No one knows the story of these retreats," M. Manouri stated, "no one knows it."

He added in another place:

"To make a vow of poverty is to swear on oath to be an idler or a thief. To make a vow of chastity is to promise God constantly to infringe the wisest and most important of His laws. To make a vow of obedience is to renounce man's unalienable prerogative, that of liberty. If one keeps one's vows one is a criminal, if one breaks them a perjurer. The cloistered life is fit only for the fanatic and the hypocrite."

A girl asked her parents' permission to join us. Her father said he consented but gave her three years to think it over. The ruling seemed harsh to the young person, who was full of fervour. Still, she had to submit. Her

vocation still enduring, she returned to her father and said that the three years had elapsed.

“Very well, my child,” he answered, “I have granted you three years to test yourself. You must now allow me as many to come to a resolution myself.”

This seemed still harder, and tears were shed. But the father was a strong-minded man who held firm. At the end of six years she made her profession. She was a good nun, simple, pious, and exact in her duties. But it so happened that the Directors took advantage of her frankness to find out at the tribune of penitence what was going on in the House. Our Superiors suspected it, she was shut up, deprived of her religious duties, and lost her wits. How can the mind resist the persecutions of fifty people all intent on the one object of torturing you? They had already laid her mother a trap which well illustrates the avarice of the cloister. They inspired the girl’s mother with the wish to come to the House and visit her daughter’s cell. She addressed herself to the Grand Vicars, who granted her the permission she sought. She arrived and went straight to her daughter’s cell. But what was her astonishment at seeing nothing but four bare walls? Everything had been taken away! They were pretty certain that this kind-hearted, sensitive mother would never leave her daughter in such a state. And, sure enough, she refurnished the room and set her up again in clothes and linen, protesting the while that the consequences of inquisitiveness were too expensive to admit of her repeating the experiment and that three or four visits like this one would ruin her brothers and sisters. It is in the cloister that ambition and luxury sacrifice one part of a family to assure the rest a more advantageous lot. It is the gutter where one throws the dregs of humanity. How many mothers like mine expiate one secret crime by another!

M. Manouri published a second Report, which made more impression that the first. People eagerly intervened. I again promised my sisters to leave them in complete and peaceful possession of my parents' estate. There was a moment when my case took a very favourable turn and I had hopes of my liberty. I was all the more cruelly deceived; my case was pleaded in court and lost. The whole community was informed of it, except myself. There was a continual stir, tumult, joy, along with small secret conversations, goings and comings in the Superior's rooms and among the nuns themselves. I trembled all over: I could neither stay in my cell nor leave it. I did not have a single friend into whose arms I might throw myself. Oh! what a cruel morning was that on which my case was decided! I wished to pray but could not. I went down on my knees, got up again, began a prayer, but, despite myself, my mind was soon away among my judges. I saw them, I heard the lawyers, addressed myself to them, interrupted my own and found my cause badly defended. I knew none of the magistrates by sight, but I pictured each of them to myself separately; some favourable, others sinister, others indifferent. I was in an inconceivable agitation and turmoil of ideas. Noise gave way to complete silence; the nuns no longer spoke to each other. Their voices seemed to me more brilliant than usual in the choir – at least those of the choir: the rest did not open their mouths. On going out after the service they silently withdrew. I persuaded myself that the wait disturbed them as much as me. But in the afternoon the noise and moving about suddenly broke out again on all sides. I heard doors opening and shutting, nuns coming and going, and the murmur of people talking low. I put my ear to the keyhole. But they seemed to keep quiet as they passed and walk on tip-toe. I knew I had lost my case. I had not an instant's doubt. I began walking round my cell without speaking. I was suffocating and could not complain: I crossed my arms over my head and propped my forehead, now against one wall, now against

another. I wanted to rest on my bed but the thumping of my heart prevented it. It is certain that I heard my heart thumping and that the thumping raised up my dress. Such was my condition when someone came and told me I was wanted. I went down, but dared not go on. The girl who summoned me was herself so cheerful that I felt the news which was brought me could only be very sad. Still, I went. On arriving at the door of the parlour, I stopped short and threw myself into the angle made by the two walls. I could not hold myself up: still, I went in. There was no one there. I waited. They had prevented the man who had had me summoned from appearing before I did. They were pretty sure he came from my lawyer, and wanted to know what might pass between us. They had collected to hear. When he appeared I was seated, my head leaning on my arm, and propped against the bars of the grille.

"I come from M. Manouri," he said.

"To tell me that I have lost my case?" I replied.

"I do not know at all, but he gave me this letter. He looked very unhappy when he charged me with it, and I have come as quickly as possible, as he told me."

"Give it me."

He handed me the letter, which I took without stirring or looking at him. I laid it on my knees and remained in the same attitude. However, he asked me if there was any answer.

"No," I said, "you may go."

He went off and I remained as I was, being unable to move or to make the effort to go away.

In the convent one may neither write nor receive letters without the consent of the Superior. One hands to her both those one receives and those one writes. I had, then, to take her mine. I started off to do so. I thought that I should never arrive. The condemned man who leaves his dungeon to go

and hear his sentence does not walk more slowly or wretchedly than I did. But eventually I reached her door. The nuns examined me from a distance. They wished to lose nothing of the sight of my grief and humiliation. I knocked and the door was opened. The Superior was there with some other nuns. I only saw the bottom of their dresses, for I dared not raise my eyes. I gave her my letter with a trembling hand. She took it, read it, and returned it. I went back into my cell, threw myself on my bed, and remained there without reading it, without getting up for dinner, without making a single movement till afternoon service. At half-past three the bell warned me to go down. Some nuns had already arrived: the Superior was at the entrance to the choir. She stopped and bade me kneel outside. The rest of the community came in and the door was shut. After the service they all went out: I let them pass and got up to follow them last. I began from that moment on to resign myself to whatever was wished of me. I had just been forbidden the church. I forbade myself recreation and the refectory. I envisaged my lot from every side, and saw no resource save in submissiveness and the need they might have of me. I could have contented myself with that sort of neglect in which I was left for several days. I had several visitors, but M. Manouri was the only one I was allowed to receive. I found him as I entered the parlour in just the same attitude as I was myself when I received his messenger, his head leaning on his arms and his arms propped against the grille. I recognized him, but said nothing. He dared neither look at me nor address me.

"I have written to you," he said without stirring. "Have you read my letter?"

"I have received but I have not read it."

"You do not know then …?"

"Yes, I know everything; I divined my fate and I am resigned to it."

"How are they treating you?"

“As yet they do not think about me at all. But I know from the past what the future has in store for me. I have but one consolation, which is this. Now I am deprived of the hope that supported me it is impossible I should suffer as much as I have suffered already. I shall die. My fault is not one of those which the Convent pardons. I do not ask God to soften the hearts of those to whose discretion He sees good to abandon me, but to give me the strength to suffer, to save me from despair, and to call me to Him promptly.”

“Had you been my own sister,” he said, weeping, “I could not have done more.…”

That man had a warm heart.

“If I can be of any use to you in any way,” he added, “dispose of me. I will see the First President: he thinks well of me. I will see the Grand Vicars and the Archbishop.”

“See no one, sir; all is over.”

“But suppose you could be changed to another House.”

“There are too many obstacles.”

“What obstacles?”

“Permission difficult to obtain, a new dowry to be found, or the old one to be extracted from this House. And then what shall I find in another House? My own unyielding heart, pitiless Superiors, nuns no better than those here, the same duties, the same griefs. It is better than I should finish my days here. There will be fewer of them.”

“But you have interested many people of position in your affairs. Most of them are well-to-do. No one here will want to stop you if you go away empty-handed.”

“That I can well believe.”

“A nun who goes away or dies increases the property of those who stay behind.”

“But these people of position, these well-to-do people, have already forgotten all about me, and you will find them quite cold when it is a matter of finding me a dowry at their own expense. Why should you suppose that it is easier for society to remove a nun without vocation from the cloister than for pious persons to send one there who has a real vocation? Is it easy to find dowries for these last? Ah, sir, everyone has abandoned me since I lost my case. I no longer see anybody.”

“Only entrust me with this business: I shall be happier so.”

“I ask for nothing, I hope for nothing, I oppose nothing. The only spring I had left is broken. If only I could promise myself that God would change me and that qualities suited to the religious state should replace in my heart the hope, now lost, of leaving it.… But that cannot be, this habit has adhered to my skin and to my bones and is all the more intolerable for that. What a fate! To be a nun for ever, to feel I shall never be anything but a bad nun! To pass all my life striking my forehead against my prison bars.”

At this point I began to cry aloud. I tried to check myself but it was impossible. M. Manouri, surprised at what I was doing, said:

“May I dare ask you a question?”

“Please do.”

“Has a grief so violent as yours no secret explanation?”

“No, sir, I hate the solitary life, I feel here in my heart that I hate it. I feel I shall always hate it, I can never subject myself to the pettinesses which fill up the day of a recluse. It is a tissue of puerilities, which I despise. I should have come round to it by now had I been able. I have tried a hundred times to deceive myself, to break myself in, I cannot. I have envied, I have asked for, my companions’ happy imbecility of mind; I have not obtained it; God will not grant it me. I do everything badly, I do everything wrong, my lack of vocation pierces through my every action and leaps to the eye. Every moment I insult the monastic life. They call my inaptitude pride and are

intent on humiliating me. My faults and punishments multiply to infinity and I pass my days measuring with my eyes the height of the walls."

"I cannot break them down, but there is something else that I can do."

"Attempt nothing."

"You must change your House. I will see about it. I shall come and see you again. I hope you will not be concealed from me. You shall have news of me at once. Be sure that if you are willing I shall succeed in getting you away from here. If they treat you too badly do not let me remain ignorant of the fact."

It was late before M. Manouri went away. I returned to my cell, and the bell soon sounded for evening service. I was one of the first to arrive. I let the nuns pass and assumed that I should have to stay at the door: and in fact the Superior did shut it on me. In the evening she made me a sign as I came in to sit on the floor in the middle of the refectory. I obeyed, and was only given bread and water. I ate a little bread, which I sprinkled with my tears. Next day a council was held, when the whole community sat in judgment on me. I was condemned to loss of recreation, to hear the service at the door of the choir for a month, to eat on the floor in the middle of the refectory, to confess my crime publicly three days in succession, then repeat the donning of my habit and my vows, to wear a hair-cloth, to fast every other day, and to scourge myself every Friday after evening service. I was on my knees with my veil lowered while this sentence was pronounced on me.

Next day the Superior came into my cell with a nun who carried on her arm a hair-cloth and the dress of rough material with which I had been clothed when I was led to the dungeon. I knew what that signified. I undressed, or rather my veil was torn off and I was stripped, and I took this dress. My feet and head were bare and my long hair fell over my shoulders. My clothes were limited to this hair-cloth which was given me, a very hard

shift, and to the long gown which came down to my feet. It was thus that I was dressed all day and appeared on every occasion.

In the evening, when I had retired to my cell, I heard people approaching and singing litanies. The whole House was drawn up in two rows. They entered and I offered myself. A rope was passed round my neck. In one hand was put a lighted torch, in the other a whip. A nun took the rope by one end and pulled me between the two rows, and the procession made its way towards a little inner oratory, consecrated to Saint Mary. They had come singing low and returned in silence. When I had arrived at the little oratory, which was illuminated by two lights, I was ordered to ask pardon of God and the community for the scandal that I had caused. The nun who led me told me in a low voice what I had to repeat and I repeated it word by word. After that the rope was taken off and I was undressed to the waist, they took my hair which was scattered over my shoulders, threw it on each side of my neck, put in my right hand the whip which I was carrying in my left, and began the *Miserere.* I understood what was expected of me and performed it. The *Miserere* finished, the Superior delivered a short exhortation. The lights were put out, the nuns retired, and I redressed again. When I was back in my cell I felt violent pains in my feet. I looked at them and perceived they were all bleeding from cuts made by broken glass which the nuns had had the wickedness to put in my way.

The next two days I made public confession in the same way, except that on the last day a psalm was added to the *Miserere.* The fourth day my nun's habit was returned to me with almost the same ceremony as that employed for this solemnity when it is public.

The fifth day I renewed my vows. For a month I went through the rest of the penitence imposed on me, after which I returned more or less into the common order of the community, and I took my turn in the choir, and at the refectory, and performed in turn the various duties of the House. But what

was my surprise when my eyes lit on that young friend who had interested herself on my behalf. She appeared almost as changed as I was. She was terribly thin, and her face was as pale as death, her lips were white, and her eyes almost lifeless.

"Sister Ursula," I said in a low voice, "what is the matter with you?"

"What is the matter with me?" she answered; "I love you and you ask me that? It was time your torture finished – I should have died of it."

The last two days of my public confession I had not had my feet wounded for the sole reason that she had had the forethought to sweep the pieces of glass to right and left. The days I was condemned to fast on bread and water she went without part of her portion, which she put into a white napkin and threw into my cell. The nun who was to lead me by the rope had been chosen by lot and the lot fell upon her. She had the strength of mind to go to the Superior and protest that she was resolved to die rather than go through with such a cruel and infamous performance. The girl was happily of good family, and in possession of a handsome allowance, which was spent according to the Superior's good pleasure. And she found a nun to replace her for a few pounds of sugar and coffee. I dare not think that the hand of God has fallen on this unworthy nun. Certainly she has lost her wits and is shut up, but then the Superior lives, rules her House, torments everybody, and is in perfect health.

My health could not possibly resist such long and cruel attempts upon it. I fell ill, and in these circumstances Sister Ursula was able to show all the friendship she had for me. I owe her my life. Not that there was any advantage in that, as she sometimes said herself. However, there was no sort of service she did not do me every day that she was at the infirmary. And the other days I was not neglected, thanks to the interest she took and to the small rewards she distributed to those who were looking after me, according as I had been more or less satisfied with them. She had asked to look after

me at night but the Superior had refused permission, alleging that she was too delicate for such fatiguing work. This was a real disappointment to her. But all her cares could not prevent my illness developing. I was reduced to the utmost extremity. I received the last sacraments. A few moments before I asked to see the whole community assembled, and my wish was granted. The nuns surrounded my bed, with the Superior in the middle of them. My young friend sat by my pillow and held my hand, which she bathed with her tears. It was presumed that I had something to say. I was lifted up and supported in a sitting posture by two pillows. Then, addressing my Superior, I asked her to grant me her benediction and to forget the faults I had committed. I then asked pardon of all my companions for the scandal which I had brought on them. I had a large number of trifles brought to my bedside which either decorated my cell or were for my private use, and I requested the Superior to let me dispose of them. She agreed, and I gave them to those who had served her as satellites when I was thrown into the dungeon. I made the nun who led me with the rope the day of my public confession come up to me, and I said as I kissed her and gave her my rosary and crucifix:

"Sister, remember me in your prayers and be sure that I will not forget you when I am before God."

And why did not God take me then? I was going to Him so calmly. And that is so great a happiness, and one which no man can promise himself twice: who knows in what state I shall be at my last hour? But still I must needs pass through it. May God renew all my sufferings if He will make me at the end as peaceful as I then was! I saw the heavens open, and they doubtless did. For Conscience does not deceive, and it promised me eternal felicity.

After taking the sacraments I fell into a kind of lethargy and I was despaired of all that night. They came and took my pulse from time to time.

I felt hands moving over my face and heard different voices saying as if from a distance: “It is going up again.… Her nose is cold.… She will not last till to-morrow.… You will keep your crucifix and rosary.” … And another angry voice which said: “Go away, go away. Let her die in peace! Have you not tortured her enough?” It was a very sweet moment for me when I emerged from this crisis and opened my eyes again to find the arms of my friend round me. She had never left me. She had passed the night in attending to me, in repeating the prayers for the dying, in making me kiss the crucifix, and in putting it to her own lips after withdrawing it from mine. She thought when she saw me open my large eyes and utter a deep sigh that it was my last. She began to cry out and call me her friend, saying: “Lord, receive her soul. When you are with God remember Sister Ursula!” I looked at her with a sad smile, shedding a tear and clasping her by the hand. At this moment M. B —— arrived. He was the House doctor, a clever man by report, but tyrannical, proud, and hard. He pushed my friend away violently, took my pulse, and felt my skin. He was accompanied by the Superior and her favourites. He put some monosyllabic questions on what had passed, and answered:

“She will get over it.”

Then looking at the Superior, who was not best pleased with this:

“Yes, Madam, she will get over it. The skin is good, the fever has fallen, and life is beginning to grow in the eyes.”

At each of these words happiness spread over the face of my friend, but over that of my Superior and her companions some sort of disappointment, but poorly disguised by the decencies.

“Sir,” I said to him, “I do not ask to live.”

“So much the worse,” he answered.

Then he ordered something and went away. I was told that during my lethargy I had several times said: “Mother, so I am going to join you! I will

tell you everything." Apparently I was addressing my former Superior, I have no doubt of it. I did not give her portrait to anybody, and wished to carry it with me to the tomb.

The prognosis of M. B —— was realized. The fever diminished, and at length abundant perspiration enabled me to throw it off completely. My recovery was no longer doubted, and cured I was, but my convalescence was a long one. It was ordained that I should suffer in this House every pain it is possible to experience. My illness was in some way infectious. Sister Ursula had scarcely left me the whole time. As my strength began to return, she lost hers; she suffered from indigestion, and was attacked in the afternoon with fainting fits which sometimes lasted a quarter of an hour. When in this state she might have been dead. Her eyesight failed, a cold sweat covered her forehead and collected in drops which ran along her cheeks. Her arms hung motionless at her sides. She gained a little relief only when she was unlaced and her garments loosened. On returning to herself her first idea was always to look for me at her side, and she always found me there. Sometimes even, when she kept a little sense of feeling and consciousness, she moved her hand round her without opening her eyes. This action was so clear that some nuns who had offered themselves to this wandering hand and were not recognized, because then she was falling back motionless, said to me:

"Sister Susan, you are the one she wants; stand by her."

I dropped at her knees and put my hand on her forehead and kept it there till the end of her swoon. When it was over she said to me:

"Well, Sister Susan, so it is I who am to go and you who are to stay. I shall be the first to see her; I shall talk to her of you, and she will not listen to me without a tear. There are bitter tears, but there are also sweet ones, and if there is Love in Heaven, why should there not be tears as well?"

She then put her hand over my neck, wept abundantly, and added:

“Good-bye, Sister Susan, good-bye, darling! Who will share your sorrows when I can no more? Who will it be? Oh, how I pity you! I am going away, I feel it, I am going away. If you were happy how sad I should be to die!”

Her condition terrified me. I spoke to the Superior: I wished her to be put in the infirmary, relieved of the services and other painful duties of the House, and for a doctor to be called in. But I was always told that it was nothing, that these fainting fits would pass of themselves, and that Sister Ursula asked nothing better than to go through with her duties and lead the communal life. One day after matins, which she had attended, she did not put in an appearance. I thought she must be very ill. Morning service over, I flew to her and found her stretched out in her clothes on her bed.

“There you are, dear one, I thought you would not be long in coming, and I was expecting you. Listen. How impatient I was for you to come. I was in such a dead faint and for so long a time that I thought I should remain in that condition and never see you again. Look! there is the key of my oratory, open the cupboard of it and remove the plank in the middle which divides the drawer into two halves. Behind this plank you will find a packet of papers. I have never been able to bring myself to part with them, however great the danger of keeping them! My tears have made them nearly illegible. When I am no more, burn them.”

She was so weak and oppressed that she could not pronounce two words of this speech in succession. She hesitated over almost every syllable, and then spoke so low that I could hardly hear, though my ear was almost pressed against her mouth. I took the key and pointed to the oratory with my finger. She made a sign to say “Yes.” Then, perceiving that I was going to lose her, and persuaded that her illness was either caught from me or the result of the unhappiness it had caused her and the care she had bestowed on me, I began to weep and lament with all my strength. I kissed her

forehead, her eyes, her face, her hands. I asked her pardon, but she was as one distraught and did not hear me. One of her hands lay on my face and caressed me. I think she did not see me any longer, perhaps even thought I had gone away, for she called me:

"Sister Susan?"

"Here I am."

"What time is it?"

"Half-past eleven."

"Half-past eleven. Go to your dinner. Be off, you can come back immediately afterwards."

The dinner-bell rang and I had to leave her. When I had reached the door she called me back. I returned; she made an effort to offer me her cheeks to kiss. I kissed them. She took my hand and held it clasped. It seemed that she could not, that she would not, leave me.

"However, I must," she said, letting me go; "God wills it. Good-bye, Sister Susan. Give me my crucifix."

I put it between her hands and went out.

The company was on the point of leaving the table. I spoke to the Superior, before all the nuns, of the dangerous state of Sister Ursula, and I urged her to judge for herself.

"Well, well," she said, "I will have a look."

She went up to Sister Ursula's room, accompanied by a few others. I followed them. They went into the cell. The Sister was no more. She was stretched on her bed, fully dressed, her head inclined on her pillow, her mouth half open, her eyes shut, and the crucifix in her hands. The Superior looked at her coldly and said:

"She is dead. Who would have thought her end so near? She was an excellent child. Let the knell be tolled for her, and let her be buried."

I remained alone by her bedside. I cannot describe to you my grief, yet I envied her. I came up to her, offered her the tribute of my tears, kissed her several times, and drew the sheet over her face, for her features were beginning to show the signs of death. Then I saw to executing her orders. So as not to be interrupted in this occupation I waited till everyone was at service. I opened the door, knocked down the plank, and found quite a large roll of papers which I burned during the evening. She had always been a melancholy girl, and I never remember having seen her smile, except once during her illness. So now I was alone in the House, alone in the world. For I knew of no one who took any interest in me. I had heard no more about the lawyer Manouri. I assumed he had either been discouraged by the difficulties with which he met or that, distracted by pleasure and work, the offers of help which he had made were now far from his mind. I did not blame him much. I tend to be by nature indulgent and can forgive everything except injustice, ingratitude, and inhumanity. So I excused M. Manouri as much as possible and all those society people who had shown such vivacity while my case lasted and for whom I no longer counted, among them even yourself, my lord. And then our Ecclesiastical Superiors visited the House. It is the visitors' duty to come in, inspect the cells, question the nuns, observe for themselves the spiritual and temporal administration, and according to the spirit they bring to the work disorders are lessened or increased. I saw once more the honest and severe M. Hébert with his two young sympathetic acolytes. Apparently they remembered the deplorable state in which I formerly appeared before them. Tears stood in their eyes, and I observed tenderness and delight upon their countenances. M. Hébert sat down and made me sit beside him. His two companions stood behind his chair, and their looks turned on me. M. Hébert said to me:

"Well, Susan, how are they treating you at present?"

"They take no notice of me, sir."

“So much the better.”

“That, too, is all I ask. But I have an important favour to ask of you, to call my Mother Superior here.”

“And why?”

“Because if anyone happens to lay a complaint before you, she will not fail to accuse me of having done it.”

“I see. But still, tell me what you know.”

“I implore you, sir, to have her called that she may hear for herself your questions and my replies.”

“Still tell me.”

“Sir, you will be my ruin.”

“Be afraid of nothing. From this day on you are no more under her authority. Before the end of the week you will be transferred to Saint Eutropia’s, near Arpajon. You have a good friend.”

“A good friend, sir; I know of none.”

“Your lawyer.”

“M. Manouri?”

“Yes.”

“I thought that he had forgotten all about me.”

“He has seen your sisters, he has seen the Archbishop, the First President, and all the leading religious people. He has provided a dowry for you in the House just named. You have only an instant to remain here. Thus, if you know of any disorder, you can tell me of it without compromising yourself, and I order you by the Holy Obedience.”

“I know of none.”

“What! They have shown restraint in their treatment of you since you lost your case?”

“They thought, they had to think, that I had committed a fault in appealing against my vows. And they made me ask pardon of God.”

“But it is just the circumstances attending this pardon that I should like to know.”

As he said this he shook his head and frowned, and I saw that it rested with me to repay my Superior some of the blows she had made me receive. But this was not my plan. The Archdeacon saw clearly he would get nothing out of me and went away, recommending me to be silent about my translation to Saint Eutropia’s at Arpajon.

While the worthy M. Hébert was walking by himself in the corridor, his two companions returned and saluted me very affectionately and tenderly. I do not know who they are, but may God preserve in them their tender and pitiful natures, which are so rare in men of their calling and which are so proper to those in whom human feebleness confides and who intercede for the pity of God. I thought that M. Hébert was busy consoling, interrogating, and reprimanding some other nun, when he came back to my cell and said:

“How do you come to know M. Manouri?”

“Through my case.”

“Who found him for you?”

“The wife of the President.”

“You had frequently to confer with him in the course of your affair?”

“No, sir, I have rarely seen him.”

“How then did you give him the information?”

“By statements drawn up in my own hand.”

“You have copies of these statements?”

“No, sir.”

“Who passed him on these papers?”

“The wife of the President.”

“And how did you know her?”

“Through Sister Ursula, my friend and a relation of hers.”

“Have you seen M. Manouri since you lost your case?”

“Once.”

“That is not much. He has not written to you at all?”

“No, sir.”

“And you have not written to him?”

“No, sir.”

“He will inform you no doubt of what he has done for you. I command you not to see him at all in the parlour, and if he writes to you, either directly or indirectly, to send me the letter without opening it. You understand me, without opening it.”

“Yes, sir, and you will be obeyed.”

M. Hébert’s distrust was equally wounding to me, whether it had reference to M. Manouri or to myself.

M. Manouri came to Longchamps the same evening. I kept my word to the Archdeacon and refused to see him. The next day he wrote to me by his emissary. I received his letter and sent it unopened to M. Hébert. It was a Tuesday, as far as I can remember. I awaited with continual impatience the effect of the Archdeacon’s promise and M. Manouri’s activities. Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday passed without my hearing a word of anything. How long the days seemed! I trembled lest some obstacle had arisen and upset everything. I was not regaining my liberty but I was changing my prison, and that is something. One happy event sows in us hopes for another, and that perhaps is the origin of the proverb: “*Bits of good luck never come singly*”.

I knew the companions whom I was leaving and had little difficulty in supposing I should be better off by living with other prisoners. Whatever they might be they could not be more ill-natured or more evilly disposed towards me.

Saturday morning about nine there was a great stir in the House and little was needed to go to the heads of the nuns. They came and went and

whispered. The dormitory doors opened and shut. Such, as you may have already observed, are the signs of monastic revolutions. I was alone in my cell. My heart was beating. I listened at the door, looked out of the window, and bustled about without knowing what I was doing. And I said to myself, trembling with joy: “It is me they have come to look for. In a moment I shall no longer be here” … and I was not mistaken.

Two unknown persons introduced themselves to me. They were a nun and the door-keeper from Arpajon. They informed me briefly of the reason for their visit. I seized tumultuously on my few treasures and threw them anyhow into the apron of the warder, who made them up into parcels. I did not ask to see the Superior. Sister Ursula was no more; I was leaving nobody.

I go down; the doors are open. After what I am taking with me has been examined, I get into a carriage and am off.

The Archdeacon and his two young ecclesiastics, the wife of the President, and M. Manouri, who were with the Superior, were warned of my departure. On the way the nun informed me about the House. The doorkeeper added as a refrain to each word of praise which was bestowed on it, “It’s simple truth.” … She congratulated herself on the fact that she had been chosen to come and fetch me, and wished to be my friend. In consequence she let me into a few secrets and gave me some advice as to my conduct. This advice no doubt met her case but could be of no use to me. I do not know whether you have seen the convent of Arpajon, one side of which looks out on the high road, the other on the gardens and the country. At each window of the side giving on the road were one, two, or three nuns. This circumstance told me more about the order that reigned in the House than everything the nun and her companion had said to me. They apparently recognized our carriage, for in the twinkling of an eye all these veiled heads disappeared and I arrived at the door of my new prison. The

Superior came to meet me with open arms, kissed me, took me by the hand, and led me to the communal hall, where some nuns had already arrived, while others came running up.

The Superior is called Madame —— , and I cannot resist the temptation of describing her before going any further. She is a quite round little woman, but quick and lively in her movements, her head is never still on her shoulders; there is always something wrong with her dress. Her face is agreeable rather than the reverse. Her eyes, of which one, the right one, is higher and larger than the other, are full of fire, and yet wandering. When she walks she throws her arms backwards and forwards: if she wants to say something she opens her mouth before she has planned out her ideas and so she stammers a little. When seated, she fidgets on her chair as though something were making her uncomfortable. She forgets the conventions and decencies and lifts up her wimple to scratch. She crosses her legs, puts you questions, you answer and she does not listen. She talks to you and gets lost, stops short, does not know where she is, loses her temper and calls you a silly creature, a fool and imbecile if you do not put her straight. She is sometimes familiar to the point of intimacy, sometimes imperious and haughtily proud, but her dignified moments are short. She is alternately soft-hearted and hard. Her features, which have lost their shape, reflect her scatterbrained intelligence and unreliable temperament. In consequence order and disorder reigned alternately in the House. There were days when all was in confusion, pensioners with novices, novices with nuns. Everyone ran in and out of each other’s rooms, where tea, coffee, chocolate, and liqueurs were drunk together, and service was despatched with the most indecent haste. Amid all this din and disturbance the face of the Superior suddenly changes, the bell sounds; everyone becomes quiet and withdraws. The deepest silence follows on the noise, and you might think everyone suddenly dead. Suppose a nun neglects the smallest detail, she is made to

come in to her cell, sternly treated, ordered to undress and give herself twenty strokes with the whip. The nun obeys, undresses, takes her whip and scourges herself. But hardly has she given herself a few strokes when the Superior, once more all softness, snatches from her her instrument of penitence, begins to weep, says how much she hates punishing anyone, kisses her forehead, her eyes, her mouth, her shoulders, caresses her, and compliments her. “What a charming white skin! How deliciously plump you are! What a lovely neck! What fine hair! Sister Saint Augusta, you are ridiculous to be so shy. Let down your underclothing! I am a woman and your Superior. What a splendid bosom! How firm it is! Am I to allow it to be torn by the nails of that whip? Certainly not.” … And she kisses her again, lifts her up, dresses her herself, says the softest things to her, dispenses her from services, and sends her back to her cell. Women like this are very difficult to live with. One never knows what they will like or dislike, what you must do or not do. Nothing is regulated. There is either too much to eat or one dies of hunger. Domestic arrangements are upset, remonstrances ill-received or disregarded. One is either too intimate or not intimate enough with Superiors of this kind. There is no real distance between them and us, no measure. One passes from disgrace to favour, from favour to disgrace, without knowing why. Would you like me to tell you of a detail, which is typical of her administration? Twice a year she ran round from cell to cell and had all the bottles of liqueur she found thrown out of the window, and four days later she herself sent other bottles back to most of the nuns. Such was the woman to whom I had made the solemn vow of obedience, for we carry on the vows made in one House to the next.

I went in with her; she led me, holding me round the waist. A collection of fruit, marzipan, and jam was served. The grave Archdeacon began to praise me, but she interrupted, saying: “She has been badly treated, badly treated, I know.” The grave Archdeacon wished to continue, but he was

interrupted with: “However did they part with her? Why, she is modesty and gentleness itself, and, I am told, extremely talented.” The grave Archdeacon wished to take up his last remarks, but the Superior interrupted again, whispering in my ear: “I love you to madness. When these heavy fellows are gone I will make our Sisters come and you will sing us a little song, won’t you?” I wanted to burst out laughing. The grave M. Hébert was a little disconcerted, and his two young companions smiled at his embarrassment and my own. Meanwhile M. Hébert readopted his ordinary character and manners, ordered her roughly to sit down, and imposed silence on her. She sat down but was not at her ease. She twisted about in her place, scratched her head, rearranged her dress where it was not disordered, and yawned. Meanwhile the Archdeacon held forth sensibly on the House which I had left, the sufferings I had experienced, on the House into which I was entering, and on the obligations which I owed to those who had helped me. At this point I looked at M. Manouri, who lowered his eyes. Then the conversation became more general, and the painful silence imposed on the Superior ceased. I went up to M. Manouri and thanked him for the service he had rendered me. I trembled and stammered and did not know what sort of return for his kindness to promise him. My distress, my embarrassment, my real feeling (for I was genuinely touched), a mixture of tears and joy, all my actions spoke to him much better than anything I could have done. His answer was no better planned than my speech, he was just as distressed as I. I do not know what he said, but I gathered that he would be adequately recompensed if he had softened the rigour of my fate; that he looked back upon what he had done with even more pleasure than I could; that he was very sorry his duties which tied him to the Paris Courts of Justice would prevent his often visiting the cloister at Arpajon; but he hoped the Archdeacon and the Superior would permit him to inquire after my health and situation.

The Archdeacon did not intend it, but the Superior answered: “My dear sir, as much as you please. She must do whatever she wants. We must try to repair here the miseries inflicted on her.” Then in a low voice to me: “My child, so you really suffered a great deal. But how could those creatures at Longchamps have the courage to maltreat you? I knew your Superior. We were pensioners together at Port Royal and everyone detested her. We shall have plenty of time together and you shall tell me all about it.” As she said this she took one of my hands and tapped it gently with her own. The young ecclesiastics also paid me their compliments. It was growing late: M. Manouri took leave of us. The Archdeacon and his companions went to the house of M. —— , the lord of the manor of Arpajon, where they had been invited, and I remained alone with the Superior. But not for long. All the nuns, all the novices, all the pensioners came running headlong in. In a moment I saw myself surrounded by a hundred persons. I did not know to whom I ought to listen or what I ought to answer. There were faces of every kind and remarks of every complexion. But I perceived they were dissatisfied neither with my answers nor my appearance.

When this importunate conference had lasted some time and the first pangs of curiosity were allayed, the crowd grew less. The Superior sent off the rest and came and settled herself in my cell. She did me the honours in her own manner. She showed me the oratory and said: “There my little friend will pray to God. I want her to have a cushion on the step so that her little knees will not be hurt. There is no holy water in the stoup. Dear Sister Dorothy always forgets something. Try this chair; see if it suits you.”

So saying she sat me down, my head over the head of the bed and kissed me on the forehead. Then she went to the windows to make sure that the sashes slid easily; then to my bed, where she pulled and repulled the curtains to see if they shut properly. She examined the coverlets.

“They are all right,” she said, and took the bolster and making it billow, said: “Our dear little head will be all right on that. The sheets are not very delicate, but they are those of the community. The mattresses are good.”

That done, she comes up to me, kisses me, and goes off. During all this scene I said internally: “What a silly creature!” and looked forward to both fair weather and foul.

I settled myself into my cell. I was present at evening service, at supper, and at recreation which followed. Some nuns came up and talked: others kept their distance. The first counted on my defending them to the Superior; the second were already alarmed at the predilection shown me. The first moments passed in reciprocal compliments, questions on the House I had left, trials of my character, my inclinations, my tastes, and my mind. They test you everywhere. They lay a succession of little traps for you, and deduce the most exact conclusions. For example, they throw out a spiteful word and look at you. They start a story and wait for you to ask how it goes on or to let it drop. If you say something commonplace they find it charming, though they know it is nothing of the sort. They praise and blame you according to plan, and try to scrutinize your most secret thoughts. You are questioned about your reading, offered both sacred and profane books and your choice is noted. They propose slight infractions of the Rule. Confidences are made you and words thrown out about the failings of the Superior. Everything is stored up and repeated. They leave you and take you up again. They sound your feelings about morals, devoutness, the world, religion, the monastic life, and everything, and there grows from out of these repeated experiments an epithet which sums you up and is attached as a surname to the one you bear. Thus I was called Saint Susan the Reserved. The first evening I was visited by the Superior. She came in to see me undress. She it was who took off my veil and wimple and put on my nightcap. She it was who undressed me. She said a hundred pretty things to

me and caressed me a thousand times, all of which embarrassed me a little, I don't know why, for it meant nothing to me or to her either. Even now when I think over it, what could it have meant to us? However, I spoke about it to my Director, who treated this familiarity, which seemed to me quite innocent and still does, in a very serious tone, and forbade me in a grave voice to lend myself to it any more. She kissed my neck, my shoulders, my arms, praised my plumpness, my figure, and put me to bed, raised the coverlets on each side, kissed my eyes, pulled my curtains, and went off. I forgot to say that she presumed I was tired and allowed me to remain in bed as long as I liked. I profited by this permission. This was, I think, the only good night I have passed in the cloister, and I have spent almost all my life there. Next day, about nine, I heard a gentle tapping at my door. I was still in bed. I answered, and the person entered. She was a nun, who said in a pretty bad-tempered way, that it was late and that the Mother Superior was asking for me. I got up, dressed hurriedly, and went to her.

"Good morning, child," she said. "Have you had a good night? Here is your coffee, which has been ready for you for an hour. I hope it will be good. Drink it up quickly and then we will talk."

While saying this she stretched out one handkerchief on the table, put another on me, poured out the coffee and put in the sugar. The other nuns did the same for each other. While I took my breakfast she talked to me of my companions, painted them according to her aversion or fancy for them, did a thousand little friendly acts for me, put me a thousand questions about the House I had left, about my parents, and my disagreeable experiences; she praised and blamed as whim directed and never listened my answer out. I did not contradict her. She was satisfied with my mind, my judgment, and my discretion. Meanwhile a nun joined us, then another, then a third, a fourth, and a fifth. They talked about the Superior's birds; this one about the twitches of one Sister, that one about the absurdities of those who were

absent, and they were all in very good spirits. There was a spinet in a corner of the cell and I laid my fingers on it absent-mindedly, for, being newly arrived in the House and not knowing the subjects of their pleasantry, I did not find the conversation very amusing, and, even had I been better informed, I should not have been more amused. It needs too much intelligence to be really amusing, and does not everyone have his absurdities? While they laughed I played some chords. Little by little I attracted attention. The Superior came up to me, and, tapping me on the shoulder, said: "Now, Saint Susan, entertain us: play first, and then you shall sing." I did what she told me and executed a few pieces which I knew by heart. I improvised at whim, and then I sang some verses from the psalms of Mondonville.

"That is excellent," said the Superior to me, "but we have as much holiness as we please in chapel: we are alone; these are my friends and they will also be yours. Sing us something gayer."

Some of the nuns said: "But perhaps that is all she knows; she is tired by her journey, we must let her off lightly. That is quite enough for once."

"No, no," said the Superior, "she is a marvellous accompanist and has the loveliest voice in the world." (And to tell the truth, it is not ugly, but has more exactness, softness, and flexibility than strength and breadth.) "I shall not let her go till she has given us something else."

I was somewhat annoyed by the remarks of the nuns, and so I answered the Superior that the Sisters were no longer enjoying it.

"But I am."

I suspected that this would be the answer. So I sang a very delicate chansonette, and they all clapped, praised me, kissed me, caressed me, and asked me for another song – false little affectations dictated by the answer of the Superior. There was hardly a girl there who would not have ruined my voice or broken my fingers if she could. Though they had perhaps never

heard a note of music in their lives, they tried to throw at my singing epithets as ridiculous as they were disagreeable, but these had no success with the Superior.

"Be quiet," she said. "She sings and plays like an angel, and I wish her to come here every day. I played the harpsichord a little in the old days, and I want her to teach me again."

"Ah, Madam," I said, "once one has learnt one does not completely forget …"

"Very willingly – give me your seat."

She improvised, and played some things, foolish, strange, disconnected, like her ideas. But I perceived across her faults of execution that her touch was infinitely lighter than mine. I told her so, for I like praising people and rarely lose an opportunity when I can do so truthfully. It is so pleasant. The nuns withdrew one after the other and I was left almost alone with the Superior, talking about music. She was seated, I was standing. She took me by the hands and said to me as she squeezed them: "But besides playing well she has the prettiest fingers in the world. Look, Sister Theresa." Sister Theresa lowered her eyes, blushed, and stammered. But whether my fingers were pretty or not, whether the Superior was right or wrong to observe it, what could it matter to Sister Theresa? The Superior clasped me round the waist and decided that I had the prettiest possible figure. She pulled me to her and made me sit on her knee. She raised my head with her hands and asked me to look at her. She praised my eyes, my mouth, my cheeks, my complexion. I made no answer, my eyes were lowered, and I lent myself to all her caresses as though I were idiotic. Sister Theresa was distracted and agitated; she walked from right to left, touched everything without wanting anything, did not know what to do with herself, looked out of the window, or thought she heard somebody knocking at the door – till the Superior said: "Sister Theresa, you can go away if you are bored."

“No, Madam, I am not bored.”

“You see I have a thousand things to ask this child.”

“I can well believe it.”

“I want to know her whole story. How can I repair the wrongs done her if I do not know what they are? I want her to tell me them all without omitting anything. I am sure my heart will be lacerated and that I shall weep; but that does not matter. Sister Susan, when shall I be told everything?”

“Whenever you order it, Madam.”

“I should ask you to tell me at once if there were time. What time is it?”

Sister Theresa answered. “It is five o’clock, Madam. The bells will ring for vespers in an instant.”

“Still, she can begin.”

“But, Madam, you promised to give me a moment’s comfort before vespers. I am disturbed in mind and should like to open my heart to Mamma. If I go to chapel without doing so I shall be unable to pray; my mind will wander.”

“No, no,” said the Superior; “you are becoming ridiculous with your notions. I swear I know what the matter is. We will talk of it to-morrow.”

“Madam,” said I to the Superior, getting up from her knees on which I had remained sitting, “grant my Sister what she asks of you. Do not lengthen her unhappiness: I am going to retire. I shall have sufficient opportunity to satisfy the interest which you are good enough to take in me. And when you have heard my Sister Theresa she will no longer be unhappy.”

I made a move towards the door to go out. The Superior retained me with one hand. Sister Theresa, on her knees, had seized the other, which she kissed as she wept, and the Superior said to her:

“Really, Saint Theresa, you are very tiresome with all your worries. I have already told you that it displeases and embarrasses me. I do not like

being embarrassed."

"I know, but I am not mistress of my feelings. Much as I should like it, I cannot …"

Meanwhile I had withdrawn and left the young Sister alone with the Superior. I could not help looking at her in chapel. She was still depressed and melancholy. Our eyes met several times. And she seemed hardly able to meet my gaze. As for the Superior, she had gone to sleep in her stall.

The service was over in the twinkling of an eye. The choir was not, it seemed to me, the part of the House in which the inmates most liked to be. They went out with the lively chatter of a flock of birds escaping from their cage: they scattered to each other's rooms, running, laughing, and talking. The Superior shut herself into her cell, and Sister Theresa stopped at the door of her own to spy on me as if anxious to know what I was going to do. I went into my own room and the door of Sister Theresa's cell only shut some time after, and then softly. The idea crossed my mind that the girl was jealous of me and was afraid I might take her place in the good graces and intimacy of the Superior. I observed her several days running, and when I thought my suspicions sufficiently confirmed by her little outbursts of bad temper, childish alarms, perseverance in tracking me everywhere, studying me, always putting herself between the Superior and myself, interrupting our talks, pouring cold water on my good qualities in order to make my faults stand out: – still more by her loss of colour, tears, the decline of her health, and even of her intelligence, I went to find her and said:

"What is the matter, my friend?"

She did not know how to answer. My visit surprised and embarrassed her. She did not know what to say or do.

"You are unjust to me. Be frank. You are frightened that I may abuse the affection I have inspired in the Superior to chill her love for you. Be

reassured. Such is not my character. If ever I were sufficiently lucky to gain any influence over her mind …"

"You will have everything you want; she loves you; she is doing for you to-day exactly what she did for me at first."

"Very well, you may be sure that I shall only use the confidence she grants me to make her fonder of you."

"And will that depend on you?"

"Why should it not depend on me?"

Instead of answering me, she threw herself on my neck and said to me with a sigh: "It is not your fault, I know very well. I tell myself so constantly. But promise me …"

"What do you want me to promise?"

"That …"

"Go on. I will do everything I can."

She hesitated, covered her face in her hands, and said to me in such a low voice that I hardly heard what she said:

"That you will see her as rarely as possible."

The request appeared so strange to me that I could not help answering: "What can it matter to you how often I see our Superior? It does not annoy me that you see her incessantly. You must not be angry if I see her just as much. Is it not sufficient that I swear that I shall do no harm to you or anybody else?"

She only answered with the following words, which she pronounced in a melancholy tone as she left me and threw herself on her bed: "I am ruined."

"Why ruined? You must think I am the wickedest creature in the world."

That was how we were when the Superior came in. She had passed my cell: she had not found me there, and had been over nearly the whole House uselessly. It had not occurred to her that I was with Sister Theresa. When she found it out from the girl she had sent to find me, she ran up to join us.

By her look and expression she seemed a little upset. But then her general bearing was rarely consistent with itself. Saint Theresa was sitting silently on the bed, I was standing up. I said to her: “Mother, I ask your forgiveness for having come here without your permission.”

“Certainly,” she said, “it would have been better to have asked.”

“But I felt so sorry for our Sister. I saw how unhappy she was.”

“And why?”

“Can I tell you? And, after all, why not? Her delicacy does so much honour to herself and proves so clearly her attachment to you. The marks of goodwill which you have bestowed on me have disturbed her in her feelings of affection for you. She was afraid I should obtain a preference over her in your heart. This feeling of jealousy, which is after all so respectable, so natural, and so flattering for you, Mother, was apparently torturing my Sister and I reassured her.”

The Superior, after listening to me, adopted a severe and imposing air and said to her:

“Saint Theresa, I have loved you and I love you still. I shall never have to complain of you and you will never have to complain of me. But I cannot tolerate these pretentions to exclusiveness. You must dismiss them from your mind if you do not want to lose what remains of my attachment for you, and remember what happened to Sister Agatha.” Then turning to me she said: “The tall dark girl you saw opposite me in the choir.” For I had talked to so few people: I had been such a short time in the House: I was so new that I did not yet know the names of my companions. She added: “I loved her, when Sister Theresa came, and I began to be fond of her. She was alarmed in the same way and had the same silly ideas. I warned her of it, she failed to correct herself, and I was obliged to take severe measures, which have lasted longer than I like and are contrary to my disposition. For everyone will tell you that I am kind-hearted and always hate punishing

people …" Then, turning to Sister Theresa, she added: "My child, I do not wish to be upset. I have already told you so. You know me. Don't make me go against my natural disposition." Then she said to me, leaning on my shoulder: "Come, Sister Susan, take me back."

We went out. Sister Theresa wanted to follow us. But the Superior, turning her head negligently over my shoulders, said in a tyrannical tone: "Go back to your cell and do not leave it without my permission" … She obeyed, slamming the door violently, while some remarks escaped her which made the Superior tremble, I do not know why, for they were quite meaningless. I saw how angry she was and said: "Mother, if you have any feeling for me, forgive Sister Theresa. She has lost her head and does not know what she is saying or doing."

"Forgive her? Gladly. But what will you give me in return?"

"Can I be lucky enough to have something to give which may please or appease you, Mother?"

She lowered her eyes, blushed, and sighed. Really she might have been in love with me. Then she said, throwing herself nonchalantly on me as though she were swooning: "Give me your forehead to kiss." I bent down, and she kissed my forehead. From then onwards as soon as a nun had done anything wrong I interceded for her and was sure to obtain her pardon by some innocent favour; always a kiss on the forehead, or the neck, or the eyes, or the cheeks or the lips, or the hands, or the throat, or the arms, but generally on the lips. She discovered my breath was sweet, my teeth white, my lips fresh and scarlet.

I must certainly have been very beautiful if I deserved the least part of the praise she showered on me. My forehead was white, regular, and charmingly shaped; my eyes were brilliant; my cheeks scarlet and soft; my hands small and plump; my bosom firm as marble and admirably shaped; as for my arms, they could not possibly be better shaped or rounder. No Sister had such a well-made neck or of a more exquisite beauty. I don't know all she said. There was an element of truth in all her compliments. I discounted a great deal of it but not everything. Sometimes she used to scan me from head to foot with a look of satisfaction that I have never seen on any other woman, and said: "It is most fortunate that God called her into this retreat. In the world, with a face like that, she would have damned every man she met and herself into the bargain. But then, God is always right."

We were walking towards her cell as we talked. I prepared to leave her, but she took me by the hand and said: "It is too late now to begin your story of Saint Mary's and Longchamps. But come in, you shall give me a short harpsichord lesson."

I followed her. In a moment she had opened the harpsichord, put the music-book in position, and drawn up a chair, for she was quick in her movements. I sat down. She was frightened I might take cold. She took a cushion from one of the chairs and put it in front of me, leant down, took my two feet and put them on it. Then I played some pieces by Couperin, Rameau, and Scarlatti.

Meanwhile she had lifted a corner of my neckerchief, her hand was placed on my bare shoulder, and the end of her fingers rested on my breast. She sighed and seemed oppressed; her breathing became irregular, the hand, which she kept on my shoulder, first pressed it hard and then not at all, as though she were without force or life, and her head fell on mine. Really the silly woman seemed to display incredible sensibility and the most lively

appreciation of music. I have never known anyone on whom it produced such a curious effect.

We were thus amusing ourselves in a manner as simple as it was pleasant, when all of a sudden the door opened violently. I was in terror and the Superior too. It was that preposterous Sister Theresa. Her clothes were in disorder, her eyes were troubled and travelled from one to the other of us with the most extraordinary attention, her lips trembled, she could not speak. Still, she came to herself again and threw herself at the feet of the Superior. I joined my prayer to hers and again obtained her forgiveness. But the Superior protested to her in the most formal manner that this would be the last time, at least for faults of this kind, and we both went out together.

As we were going back to our cells I said: “My dear Sister, take care or you will turn our Mother against you. I will never desert you, but will use my credit with her on your behalf, and I shall be in despair if I can do nothing for you or anyone else. But what are you thinking about?”

No answer.

“Why are you afraid of me?”

No answer.

“Cannot our Mother love us both equally?”

“No,” she answered violently, “that is impossible; I shall soon be disgusting to her and that will kill me. Why did you come here? You will not be happy long, I am sure, and I shall be wretched for ever.”

“Certainly,” I said, “I know it is a great misfortune to have lost the good graces of one’s Superior, but I know a greater one, which is to have deserved it. You have nothing with which to reproach yourself.”

“Would to God it were so!”

“If you have something with which to reproach yourself you must repair it, and the surest method is to bear the punishment patiently.”

“I cannot! I cannot!” And then: “Is she the person to punish me?”

“She, Sister Theresa, she! Do you talk thus of your Superior? That is not right. You forget yourself. I am sure that this is a graver error than those with which you reproach yourself.”

“Would to God it were so,” she repeated. “Would to God it were so”; and we parted, she to go and wait in her cell, I to reflect on the strangeness of the female mind.

Such is the effect of retiring from the world. Man is born for society. Separate him, isolate him, his ideas grow disconnected, his character becomes twisted, and a thousand ridiculous affections grow in his mind, like roots in uncultivated ground. Put a man in a forest and he becomes ferocious; in a cloister where the notion of inevitability is joined to the notion of slavery and it is still worse. You can leave a forest, you cannot leave a cloister. Perhaps more force of soul is necessary to resist solitude than want. Want lowers a man, retirement depraves his mind. It is better to live in abjection than in madness? That I dare not decide, but both are to be avoided.

I saw that the affection my Superior had conceived for me grew from day to day. I was continually in her cell or she in mine. If I was in the smallest degree unwell I was sent into the infirmary, released from going to chapel, sent early to bed, or forbidden to get up for Morning Prayers. In the choir, in the refectory, at recreation she found means to show the marks of her affection. In the choir, if she came on some verse manifesting an affectionate or tender sentiment she would sing it herself, addressing me at the same time, or looked at me if it were sung by another. In the refectory she always sent me some dainty which had been served her. At recreation she hugged me round the waist and said the softest and most obliging things. She was given no present which she did not share with me. Chocolate, sugar, coffee, liqueurs, snuff, handkerchiefs, or anything: she bared her cell of engravings, domestic utensils, linen, furniture, and an

infinity of pleasant things that they might adorn mine. I could hardly be absent a moment without finding myself on my return enriched by some presents. I used to go and thank her in her room and she would manifest an inexpressible delight. She would embrace me, caress me, take me on her knees, talk to me about the most secret details of the House, and would promise herself, if I loved her, a life a thousand times more agreeable than that which she would have passed in the world. After that she would stop and look at me with melting eyes and say:

"Sister Susan, do you love me?"

"How could I not love you? I should have to be very ungrateful."

"That is true."

"You are so full of kindness …"

"Say, rather, of affection for you."

As she uttered these words she lowered her eyes; the hand with which she was embracing me clasped me more tightly … She drew me to her: her face was near my own. She sighed, fell back on the chair, and trembled. One would have said she wished to tell me something and did not dare; she shed tears, and then said:

"Ah! Sister Susan, you do not love me."

"What! Not love you, Mother!"

"No!"

"Then tell me, what must I do to prove it?"

"That you must guess."

"I try to and cannot."

Meanwhile she had raised her neckerchief and placed one of my hands on her breast. She was silent and so was I. She appeared to experience the greatest rapture. She asked me to kiss her forehead, her cheeks, her eyes, and her lips. I obeyed her. I do not think there can have been any harm in that. Meanwhile her pleasure increased, and as I asked nothing better than

to add to her pleasure in any innocent way, I kissed her again on her forehead, her cheeks, her eyes, and her lips … She exhorted me stammering and in a low and strange voice to redouble my caresses, and I did so. Then came a moment, I know not if it was pleasure or pain, when she turned pale as death: her eyes closed, all her body stiffened violently, her lips first were tightened and then wet as if with a light froth; then her mouth opened slightly and she seemed to me to die, as she uttered a deep sigh. I got up quickly: I thought she was ill. I wished to go out and call for help. She opened her eyes fully and said in a dying voice: "My innocent, it is nothing. What are you going to do? It is nothing." I looked at her with puzzled eyes, uncertain if I should go or stay. She opened her eyes once more. She could no longer say anything. She signed to me to approach and put me on to her knees again. I do not understand what went on inside me. I was afraid, I trembled, my heart thumped, I had difficulty in breathing, I felt disturbed, oppressed, agitated; I was frightened. I felt that my strength was abandoning me and that I was going to swoon. But I cannot say that the experience was exactly painful. I went up close beside her; she signed to me with her hands to sit on her knees. I obeyed. She was as though dead and I as though about to die. We both remained a considerable time in this singular condition. Had some nun come in she would have been really frightened. She must have imagined either that we were ill or had fallen asleep. However, the good Superior (for one cannot have so much sensibility and not be good) seemed to come to herself. She remained collapsed in her chair: her eyes were still closed, but her face was animated by the liveliest colours. She took one of my hands and kissed it, while I said to her: "Mother, how you have frightened me!" She smiled softly without opening her eyes:

"But have you not been in pain?"

"No."

“But I thought you had. – Oh, the innocent! oh, the innocent darling! How I like her!”

As she said this she got up, sat down again in her chair, took me in her arms and kissed me violently on the cheeks; then she said:

“How old are you?”

“Not yet twenty.”

“Impossible.”

“It is absolutely true, Mother.”

“I want to hear about your whole life. You will tell me?”

“Yes, Mother.”

“Everything?”

“Everything.”

“But someone might come in. Let us sit down at the clavichord. You shall give me a lesson.”

We went to it. I do not know how it was but my hands trembled and the paper seemed only a confused mass of notes. I could not play at all. I told her so; she began to laugh, and took my place, but it was worse still. She could scarcely lift her arms.

“Child,” she said, “I see you are scarcely in a state to teach or I to learn. I am a little tired and must rest. Good-bye; to-morrow without fail. I want to know everything that has happened to that dear little soul of yours. Good-bye.”

Before, when I went away she had accompanied me as far as the door and followed me with her eyes all along the corridor to my own room. She would throw me a kiss with her hands and only go back into her room when I was in my own. This time she hardly got up: it was all she could do to reach the arm-chair, which was beside her bed. She sat, bent her head on the pillow, threw me a kiss with her hands, and I went off.

My cell was almost opposite that of Saint Theresa. Her door was open: she waited for me, stopped me, and said:

“Ah, Sister Susan, are you coming from our Mother’s?”

“Yes,” said I.

“You were there a long time.”

“As long as she wanted me.”

“That is not what you promised me.”

“I did not promise you anything.”

“Will you dare tell me what you did there?”

Although my conscience had nothing with which to reproach me I will admit, my lord, that her question embarrassed me. She perceived it, insisted, and I answered:

“Sister, if you will not believe me, perhaps you will believe our Mother. Go and find out from her.”

“Sister Susan,” she answered energetically, “take care what you are about. You do not want to make me unhappy. She would never forgive me! You do not know her. She is capable of passing in a moment from the greatest sensibility to complete ferocity. I do not know what would happen to me. Promise to say nothing about it to her.”

“You want me to promise?”

“I implore you on my knees. I am in despair. I see clearly that I must resign myself, and resign myself I will. Promise me to say nothing about it to her.…”

I raised her up and gave her my word of honour. She relied on it, and there she was right. Then we each shut ourselves up in our own cells. Once in my room, I became moody. I wished to pray and could not. I tried to busy myself with something, started one piece of work, which I dropped for another, and that for a third. My hands ceased functioning of themselves and I might have been imbecile. I had never felt anything like it before. My

eyes closed of themselves, and I dropped off to sleep, although I never sleep during the day. On waking, I questioned myself on what had happened between the Superior and me, and looked into myself. On further examination I thought I half-perceived. But my notions were so vague, foolish, and ridiculous that I put them right away from me, and I finally came to the conclusion that it was perhaps an illness to which she was subject; and then I thought that perhaps this illness was catching, that Saint Theresa had caught it and that I should catch it too.

Next day, after morning service, our Superior said to me: “To-day I hope I may hear your whole story. Come along …”

I went with her. She made me sit down in her arm-chair beside her bed and sat herself in a rather lower chair. I dominated her a little because I am the taller and was in the taller chair. She was so near me that our knees intertwined and her elbows were on the bed. After a moment’s silence I said:

“Though I am still quite young I have gone through a great deal. I shall soon be twenty, and I have been miserable for twenty years. I do not know if I can tell you everything, or if you will have the heart to listen to me. Sorrows with my parents, sorrows in the convent of Saint Mary, sorrows in the convent of Longchamps, sorrows everywhere. Mother, where shall I begin?”

“At the beginning.”

“But, Mother,” I said, “it will be a very long, sad story, and I should not like to depress you for so long.”

“Do not be afraid. I enjoy crying. It is a delicious state of mind for a gentle nature, that of shedding tears. You must like weeping too. You will dry my tears and I will dry yours, and perhaps we shall be happy amid the recital of all your sufferings. Who knows how far emotion may not lead us? …”

As she uttered these last words she scanned me from top to bottom with eyes already moist. She came still nearer to me, so that we were touching.

"Go on, my child, I am waiting, and feel quite ready to get into the most emotional state. I do not think I have ever passed a more sympathizing and affectionate day."

So I began my story, much as I have written it to you. I cannot describe to you the effect it produced on her, the sighs she heaved, the tears she shed, the words of indignation she piled on my cruel parents and the terrible girls of Saint Mary's and Longchamps. I should be sorry to think they ever underwent the smallest part of the sufferings that she desired for them. I should not like to snatch a hair from the head of my cruellest enemy. From time to time she interrupted me, got up, walked about and then sat down again: at other times she raised her eyes to heaven, then hid her head between my knees. When I told of the dungeon, of the exorcism and the public confession she almost cried aloud. When I had finished she remained silent some time with her body bent over her bed, and I said to her:

"Mother, I am sorry for all the pain I have caused you. I warned you, but you would have it." She answered only with these words:

"The wicked creatures! the horrible creatures! Only in convents can all human feeling be extinguished so utterly. When hate works on a disposition naturally bad there is no length to which things may not go. Happily I am soft-hearted; I love all the nuns in a differing degree, they have taken on my character. They all love each other. But how can your feeble health have resisted all these tortures? Why have these little limbs not been broken? How has all this delicate machine escaped destruction? How comes it that the lustre of your eyes has not been dimmed with weeping? The brutes! Fancy binding these arms with ropes …" She took my arms and kissed them. "Fancy drowning these eyes in tears", and she kissed them, "or calling forth from these lips complaints and groans", and she kissed my lips,

“or condemning this charming and serene countenance to continual clouds of sorrow”, and she kissed my face, “or withering the roses on these cheeks”, and she stroked them with her hand and kissed them, “or destroying the beauty of that head, tearing that hair out, and lining that brow with care”, and she kissed my head, my brow, and my hair. “Fancy daring to put a rope round that neck and tear those shoulders with pointed nails!” She pushed aside the covering of my neck and head and opened the top of my dress. My hair fell scattered on my bare shoulders: my breast was half-exposed, and she covered with kisses my neck, bare shoulders, and half-naked breast. I then perceived, from the trembling that seized her, from her troubled speech, the wildness of her eyes and hands, from the warmth with which she hugged me, the violence with which her arms embraced me, that her illness would not be long in coming again. I do not know what was happening inside me, but I was seized with a terror, a trembling, and a desire to swoon which verified my suspicion that her illness was contagious.

I said to her: “Mother, see you have disarranged me! Suppose someone came in!”

“Stop! stop!” she replied in a suffocating voice. “No one will come in.”

However, I made an effort to get up and escape from her, but I could not. I found I had no strength and that my knees gave way under me. She was seated, I was standing up. She pulled me towards her. I was afraid of falling on her and hurting her. I sat on the edge of the bed and said to her:

“Mother, I do not know what it is, but I feel ill.”

“And I too,” she said, “but keep quiet a moment and it will pass. It will not be anything.”

And, in fact, my Superior regained her calm and so did I. We were both overcome. My head was bent on her pillow, her head lay on one of my knees, her forehead was placed on one of my hands. We remained some

time in this condition. I do not know what she was thinking about. For my own part I was not thinking at all – I could not, my weakness had obtained a complete hold of me. We both observed a silence which the Superior was the first to break. She said: “Susan, I think you said of your first Superior that she was very dear to you.”

“Very.”

“She did not love you more than I do, but you loved her better … You do not answer.”

“I was unhappy and she consoled me in my grief.”

“But whence came your distaste for the religious life? Susan, you have not told me everything.”

“But I have, Madam.”

“What! But considering how charming you are (for you are very charming, child, you do not know how charming) you must have been told so.”

“I have been told so.”

“And the man who told you so was not unpleasing to you?”

“No.”

“And you were attracted by him?”

“Not in the least.”

“What! – your heart has never spoken?”

“Never.”

“What! So it was not some passion, either kept a secret or disapproved by your parents, which has given you an aversion from convent life? Tell me that! I am not strict.”

“Mother, I have nothing to confide on that point.”

“But, once more, whence comes your distaste for the religious life?”

“From the life itself. I hate its duties, its occupations, the retreat, the constraint. I think I am meant for something else.”

“But what makes you think that?”

“The crushing boredom. I am bored.”

“Even here?”

“Yes, Mother, even here, despite all your kindness.”

“But you do not feel in yourself any stirrings or desires?”

“None.”

“I believe what you say. You seem to have a calm temperament.”

“Fairly calm.”

“Cold even.”

“I don’t know.”

“You do not know the world.”

“Hardly at all.”

“Then what charm can it have for you?”

“That I cannot quite explain to myself. Still, it must have some.”

“Is it your liberty which you regret?”

“That and perhaps many other things as well.”

“And what other things? Talk to me openly, dear. Would you like to be married?”

“I would rather be married than what I am, that is certain.”

“Why this preference?”

“I don’t know.”

“You don’t know? But tell me, what impression does the presence of a man make on you?”

“None. If he is clever and talks well I like listening to him. If he is good-looking I notice it.”

“And your heart is not stirred?”

“Till the present it has been unmoved.”

“What! When they have turned lively glances on you, you have experienced no …?”

“Embarrassment, sometimes. They make me lower my eyes.”

“And without any distress?”

“Without any.”

“And your senses said nothing to you?”

“I know nothing about the language of the senses.”

“Such exists, however?”

“Perhaps.”

“And you do not know it?”

“Not at all.”

“What! You … It is a pleasant language. Would you like to know it?”

“No, Mother, what use would it be to me?”

“It would dissipate your boredom.”

“Or perhaps increase it. Besides, what can this language of the senses signify if it is addressed to no object?”

“When one talks it is always to somebody. It is certainly better than talking to oneself, though even that is not entirely without charm.”

“I do not understand at all.”

“If you liked, child, I would speak more clearly.”

“No, Mother, I know nothing and would rather remain ignorant than acquire knowledge that would perhaps make me more to be pitied than I am already. I have no desires at present, and I do not the least wish to discover something I could never satisfy.”

“And why could you not?”

“How could I?”

“As I do.”

“As you do! But there is nobody in the House.”

“There is you, dear, and I.”

“But what am I? What are you?”

“How innocent you are!”

“Yes, you are right, Mother, I am very innocent, and would rather die than cease to be so.”

I do not know why these words should have upset her … but they made her entirely change countenance. She became grave and embarrassed. The hand which she had laid on one of my knees first ceased to press it, and was then withdrawn. She kept her eyes lowered. I said to her:

“Mother, what have I done? Have I let fall something which has offended you? Forgive me. I take advantage of the liberty you granted me and do not think out what I say to you, and even if I thought it out I should not say it any better, perhaps worse. The things we are discussing are so foreign to me. Forgive me!”

As I said these last words, I threw my arms round her neck and laid my head on her shoulder. She threw her arms round me and clasped me tight. We remained some moments in this position; then, regaining her tenderness and serenity, she said to me:

“You sleep well, Susan?”

“Very well,” I said; “particularly recently.”

“You get to sleep at once?”

“Generally.”

“When you don’t get to sleep at once, what do you think about?”

“On my past life, or what is in store for me; or I pray; or I cry. I don’t know.”

“And in the morning, when you wake early?”

“I get up.”

“At once?”

“Yes.”

“You do not like dreaming then?”

“No.”

“Or lying on your pillow?”

“No.”

“Or enjoying the pleasant warmth of your bed?”

“No.”

“Never?”

She paused here, and properly so, for what she was going to ask me was not right. And perhaps I am still more wrong to repeat it. But I have made up my mind to hide nothing.

“You have never been tempted to observe with satisfaction how handsome you are?”

“No, Mother; I am not sure I am as handsome as you say. And even if I were, one is handsome for others, not for oneself.”

“You have never thought of running your hands over your lovely breast, over your body, your flesh, which is so firm, so soft, and so white.”

“Good gracious, no! But that is a sin. And if I had done such a thing I cannot imagine how I should have been able to confess it.”

I forget what we said after this, but then someone came and told the Superior that she was awaited in the parlour. The visit apparently annoyed her, and she would have preferred to go on talking to me, though what we said was hardly worth the trouble of regretting; so we separated.

The community had never been so happy as it was since my arrival. The Superior appeared to have lost her temperamental lack of balance. People said I had a settling effect on her. She even gave several days’ recreation in my favour, and what are called feasts. On these days the food is better than usual, the services are shorter and all the time between them is given over to recreation. But these happy times were to pass for others and for me. The scene I have just described was followed by a number of similar ones, which I omit. Here is what then ensued.

My Superior began to fall a victim to nerves. She lost her gaiety, and her plumpness, and slept badly. The following night, when everybody was

asleep and the House was silent, she got up. After having wandered for some time about the corridors, she came to my cell. I was sleeping lightly and thought I recognized her step. She stopped. Apparently she rested her head against the door, and in so doing made enough noise to wake me up if I were asleep. I remained quiet, and I thought I heard a voice which wailed, somebody who sighed. I shivered slightly and determined to say *Ave.* Instead of answering, whoever it was withdrew. But she came back some time afterwards: the wails and sighs began again. I again said *Ave*, and the steps again withdrew. I reassured myself and fell asleep. While I slept, someone came in and sat down beside my bed. The curtains were partly withdrawn. She had a little candle, the light of which fell on my face, and she who carried it watched me sleeping: so I judged at least from her attitude when I opened my eyes. And this person was the Superior.

I sat up suddenly. She saw that I was frightened and said: "You need not be alarmed, Susan, it is I." I put my head back on my pillow and said: "Mother, what are you doing here at this hour? What can have brought you? Why are you not asleep?"

"I cannot sleep," she answered. "I shall not sleep for a long time yet. I am tortured by horrid dreams. No sooner are my eyes closed than I live in imagination through all the agonies you have experienced. When I picture you in the hands of those inhuman monsters I see your hair falling over your face, your feet bleeding, the torch in your hand, the rope round your neck: I feel they are going to take away your life: I shiver and tremble: my whole body breaks into a cold sweat: I want to run and help you: I wake up screaming and wait in vain for the return of sleep. This is what has happened to me tonight. I feared Heaven was announcing that some misfortune had come to my friend: I got up and came to your door and listened. You did not seem to be sleeping: you spoke and I withdrew: I came back, you spoke again and I withdrew again. I came back a third time, and

when I thought you were asleep, I came in. I have been at your side some time and have been afraid to wake you. I hesitated at first to draw aside your curtains. I wanted to go away for fear of disturbing you. But I could not resist the desire to see if my dear Susan was well. I looked at you. How lovely you are even when you are asleep."

"How good you are, Mother."

"I am quite cold. But now I know that I need not worry about my child. I think I shall get to sleep. Give me your hand." I gave it to her.

"How calm your pulse is! How regular! Nothing disturbs it!"

"I sleep quietly."

"How lucky you are!"

"You will get colder than ever."

"You are quite right; good-bye, darling, good-bye. I am going away."

Still she did not go at all, but continued looking at me. Two tears rolled down her cheeks. "Mother," I said, "what is the matter? What has happened? You are crying. I am sorry I told you of my misfortunes!" At that moment she shut the door, blew out the candle, threw herself upon me. She held me in her arms. She was lying on the coverlet beside me. Her face was pressed to mine, her tears damped my cheeks. She sighed and said to me in a disturbed, choking voice: "Pity me, my darling."

"Mother," I said, "what is the matter? Are you ill? What can I do?"

"I am shivering and trembling," she said. "I have turned mortally cold."

"Would you like me to get up and give you my bed?"

"No," she said, "you need not get up. Just pull the coverlet aside a little and I may get near you. Then I shall get warm and be well."

"But that is forbidden, Mother dear! What would people say if they knew? I have seen nuns given penance for much less serious things than that. At Saint Mary's a nun happened to pass the night in another's cell; she was her particular friend, and I cannot tell how badly it was thought of. The

Director asked me sometimes if nobody had ever suggested coming and sleeping by my side, and warned me gravely never to tolerate it. I even spoke to him of your caresses. I thought them quite innocent, but he did not think so at all. I do not know how I came to forget his advice. I had meant to speak to you of it."

"Everything round us is asleep, darling," she said. "Nobody will know anything about it. It is I who distribute rewards and penalties, and, whatever the Director may say, I cannot see what harm there can be in one friend taking in beside her another friend who has felt upset, woken up, and has come during the night, despite the rigour of the season, to see if her darling was in any danger. Susan, at your parents', have you ever shared a bed with your sisters?"

"No, never."

"If the occasion had arisen you would not have scrupled to do so? If your sister had come frightened and stiff with cold to ask for a place by your side, would you have refused her?"

"I think not."

"But am I not your Mother?"

"Yes, you are, but it is forbidden."

"Darling, it is for me to forbid it to others, to allow it to you and to ask it of you. Let me warm myself a moment and I will go away. Give me your hand.… " I gave it her.…

"Come," she said, "touch me and see. I am trembling, shivering, and like marble."

It was quite true.

"My poor Mother will be ill," I said. "See, I will go to the edge of the bed, and you can put yourself in the warm place."

I went to the edge, lifted up the coverlet, and she got into my place. How ill she was! She was trembling in every limb. She wanted to talk to me and

came nearer. She could not articulate or move. She said in a low voice: “Susan dear, come a bit nearer …” She stretched out her arms: I turned my back on her; she took me quietly and pulled me towards her. She passed her right arm under my body and the left over it, and said: “I am frozen; I am so cold that I am frightened to touch you, for fear of doing you some harm.”

“Don’t be afraid, Mother.”

She immediately put one of her hands on my breast and another round my waist. Her feet were under mine and I pressed them to warm them, and she said: “See how quickly my feet have got warm, darling, now that nothing separates them from yours.”

“But what prevents you warming yourself elsewhere in the same way?”

“Nothing, if you are willing.…”

Suddenly there were two violent knocks on the door. In terror I immediately threw myself out of the bed on one side and the Superior threw herself out on the other. We listened and heard someone gaining the neighbouring cell on tip-toe. “Oh,” I said, “it is Sister Theresa. She must have seen you passing in the corridor and coming into me. She must have listened to us and overheard our conversation. What will she say?”

I was more dead than alive.

“Yes, it is she,” said the Superior in an exasperated voice. “It is she: I have no doubt of it. But I hope she will not easily forget her rashness.”

“Mother,” I said, “do not do her any harm.”

“Susan, good-bye, good night. Get into bed again and sleep well. I dispense you from prayers. I am now going to see this young fool. Give me your hand.”

I stretched it to her from one side of the bed to the other. She pulled back the sleeve which covered my arms, and with a sigh kissed it all along from the end of my fingers to my shoulder; then she went out protesting that the rash girl who had dared disturb her should not forget it. Immediately I went

to the other end of my bed near the door and listened. She went into Sister Theresa's cell. I was tempted to get up and go and interpose between them, supposing a violent scene occurred. But I was so upset, so ill at ease, that I preferred to remain in bed: I said nothing, however. I thought that I should become the talk of the House, and that this adventure in which there was nothing that could not be easily explained would be recounted in all its most unfavourable aspects: that it would be worse here than at Longchamps, where I was accused of I know not what: that our fault would come to the knowledge of our superiors: that our Mother would be deposed and both of us severely punished. Meanwhile I was all ears, and waited impatiently for the Mother to leave Sister Theresa's cell.

Apparently the matter was difficult to arrange, as she remained there nearly all night. How I pitied her. She was naked except for her shift, and stiff with rage and fright.

In the morning I should have been glad to profit by the permission she had given me and remain in bed. But it occurred to me that I ought not to do so. I dressed quickly and got to the choir first. The Superior and Sister Theresa did not put in an appearance, of which I was very glad; first because I should have found it difficult to meet her glance without embarrassment, secondly because the fact that she had had leave to absent herself from the service showed that she must have obtained from the Superior forgiveness, and forgiveness would only be bestowed on terms which would relieve me of anxiety. I had guessed correctly.

Scarcely was service finished, when the Superior sent for me. I went to see her. She was still in bed and appeared very exhausted. "I have been very unhappy: I have not slept a wink. Saint Theresa is mad: if it happens again I shall shut her up."

"Oh! Mother," said I, "do not ever shut her up."

“That depends on her conduct. She has promised me to improve, and I count on it. And how are you, dear Susan?”

“Very well, Mother.”

“You have rested a little?”

“Very little.”

“I was told that you were in the choir. Why did you not stay in bed?”

“I should have been uncomfortable there. And then I thought it was better …”

“No, it would have been quite all right. But I feel I should like to have a sleep. You had better go and do the same in your cell, unless you like to accept a place beside me.”

“I am extremely obliged to you, Mother, but I am accustomed to do so alone, and could not with anyone else.”

“Very well. I shall not come to refectory for dinner. It will be served here. Perhaps I shall not get up the rest of the day. You will come with some others I have asked.”

“And is Sister Theresa among them?”

“No.”

“I am rather glad of that.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know, but I seem frightened of meeting her.”

“Do not be nervous, child. I can assure you that she is more frightened of you than you need be of her.”

I left her and went to lie down. In the afternoon I went to the Superior’s room, where I found a largeish company of all the youngest and prettiest nuns. The others had already paid their visit and left. You are an authority on painting, my lord, and I can assure you it made a very pretty picture. Imagine a room containing ten to twelve people, of which the youngest might be fifteen and the oldest not more than twenty-three; a Superior of

about forty, white-skinned, fresh, rather plump, half-sitting up in bed, with a double chin which she carried off gracefully, arms as round as if they had been turned on the lathe, dimpled fingers, eyes dark and soft, hardly ever wide open, half-shut, as if the owner found it tiring to open them, lips red as roses, teeth white as milk, the prettiest cheeks in the world, and an attractive head buried in a deep soft pillow, her arms stretched languidly beside her, with little cushions under the elbows for support. I was seated on the edge of the bed, doing nothing; another was in an arm-chair with a little embroidery frame on her knees; others, near the window, were making lace. Others were on the ground, sitting on cushions which had been taken off the chairs, sewing, embroidering, unpicking threads, or working at a small spinning-wheel. Some were fair, others dark, no two were alike, though all were good-looking. They differed as much in character as in appearance. Some were serene, some high-spirited, others grave, melancholy, or sad. Everybody, except myself, was working, as I have said. It was not difficult to say which were friendly, which were indifferent or hostile to each other. Friends had got seats either side by side or opposite each other, and while they worked they talked, asked each other advice, looked at each other furtively, and squeezed each other's fingers under the guise of handing a pin or needle or a pair of scissors. The Superior ran over them with her eyes: she reproached one with her industry, another with her idleness, this one with her indifference, that one with her low spirits; she had the work brought her and praised or blamed it. She altered the cap of one. "Your veil is too far forward", "Your face is too much covered and your cheeks hidden", "The folds are all wrong." She distributed to everyone reproaches or caresses.

While they were thus occupied, I heard someone gently tapping at the door and went to it. The Superior said to me: "You will be coming back, Saint Susan?"

“Yes, Mother.”

“Because I have something important to tell you. So do not fail me.”

It was that unfortunate Sister Theresa. She said nothing for a moment, nor did I. And then I said: “You are wanting me, Sister?”

“Yes.”

“How can I help you?”

“I will tell you. I have incurred the ill-favour of our Mother. I thought that she had forgiven me, and had some reason for supposing so. However, you are all assembled in her room without me, who am told to keep to my cell.”

“You would like to come in?”

“Yes.”

“You want me to ask leave for you?”

“Yes.”

“Wait a moment, I will go and ask.”

‘You will really ask her for me?”

“Why should I not promise you to do so, and why should I not do so after having promised?”

“Oh,” she said, looking at me tenderly, “I forgive her her love for you. You have all the graces, the loveliest soul, and the loveliest body.”

I was enchanted to be able to do her this slight service. I came in. Another had, in my absence, taken my place on the edge of the Superior’s bed and had leant over her, with her elbow propped up between the Superior’s legs, as she showed her work. The Superior, her eyes nearly closed, said “Yes” and “No”, almost without looking. I was standing by her side and she did not notice it. But she soon emerged from her small absent fit. The one who had taken my place gave it back to me. I sat down again, but then, bending slightly towards the Superior, who had risen a little on her pillow, I remained silent but looked as though I had a favour to ask her.

“Well,” she said, “what is it? Tell me what you want. How can I refuse you anything?”

“Sister Saint Theresa …”

“I understand. I am very dissatisfied with her. But Saint Susan intercedes for her and I forgive her. Go and tell her she can come in.”

I ran off. The poor little Sister was waiting at the door. I told her to come along. She did so, trembling, and with lowered eyes. She was holding a long piece of muslin attached to a pattern which dropped from her hands at the first step. I picked it up. I took her by the arm and led her to the Superior. She fell at her knees and seized one of her hands with sighs and tears. Then she seized one of mine, which she joined to that of the Superior and kissed them both. The Superior signed to her to get up and sit wherever she liked. She obeyed. Refreshments were served. The Superior got up. She did not sit down with us, but walked round the table, laying her hand on one girl’s head, pulling it gently back and kissing her forehead, lifting up the neckerchief of another, putting her hand over the neck and remaining propped up on the back of the chair; passing on to a third and letting a hand run over her, or putting it over her mouth, first putting the food to her own lips and then distributing it to this girl and to that. Having thus gone the round for a moment, she stopped opposite me and looked at me with very affectionate and tender glances, while the other girls lowered their eyes as though afraid to constrain or distract her, but especially Sister Saint Theresa. After taking our refreshment I sat down at the harpsichord and accompanied two Sisters who sang without technique but in time and with a good voice and sure taste. I also sang, accompanying myself. The Superior was seated at the end of the harpsichord and appeared to take the greatest pleasure in hearing and watching me. The other Sisters stood up and listened without doing anything, or settled down to their work again. It was

a delightful evening. Then everybody withdrew. I was going off with the others, but the Superior stopped me.

"What is the time?" she said.

"Close on six."

"Some of our advisers are coming. I have thought over what you said to me about your departure from Longchamps and have communicated my ideas to them. They have approved them, and we have a proposition to make to you. We cannot but succeed, and if we do succeed it will be something gained for the House and a comfort to you."

At six o'clock the advisers came in; this Council always consists of very old and decrepit women. I got up. They sat down, and the Superior said to me: "Sister Saint Susan, did you not tell me that you owed to the beneficence of M. Manouri the dowry which has been found for you here?"

"Yes, Mother."

"So I am not mistaken, and the Sisters at Longchamps have remained in possession of the dowry which you paid them on entry?"

"Yes, Mother."

"They gave you nothing at all back?"

"No, Mother."

"That is not right. I have communicated the facts to the Council and they think, as I do, that you have the right to appeal against them for the restitution of your dowry for the advantage of this House, or at any rate for the payment of the interest on it. What you possess as a result of the concern which M. Manouri felt about your future has nothing to do with what the Sisters of Longchamps owe you. He did not supply your dowry in order to pay off a debt to them."

"I do not think so. But to make quite sure, the quickest thing would be to write to him."

“No doubt. Then on the assumption that his answer is such as we wish, we have the following propositions to make you. We will undertake the action against Longchamps in your name. Our House will pay the costs, which will not be heavy because there is every likelihood that M. Manouri will be willing to take up the case himself; if we win, the House will share equally with you either the capital or the interest. What do you think of that, Sister? You do not answer. There is something on your mind.”

“Yes, this. The Sisters of Longchamps treated me very badly and I should hate them to imagine that I was revenging myself on them.”

“There is no question of revenge, but of asking for your own property back.”

“But to make a spectacle of oneself again!”

“That is a mere trifle. You will hardly appear in the matter. And then our community is poor and Longchamps rich. You will be our benefactress, at least for as long as you live, though we do not need that motive to make us want to keep you. We all love you.” And then all the Council in chorus … “And who would not love her? She is perfect.”

“I might die at any moment, another Superior might perhaps not share my feelings for you. No, she certainly would not. You might have some slight indisposition, some trifling wants. It is nice to have a little money of one’s own to spend on one’s own comforts or to enable one to help others.”

“The fact that you have put forward these proposals proves, Mother,” I said, “that there is much to be said for them. There are other considerations which affect me even more. But there is no personal feeling which I am not ready to abandon for you. The only favour I have to ask you, Mother, is to begin nothing without having conferred, in my presence, with M. Manouri.”

“Nothing more proper. Would you like to write yourself?”

“As you like, Mother.”

“Write to him then. And so that we may not have to return to this subject again, for I do not care about this sort of business, it bores me to death, write immediately.”

I was given pen, ink, and paper, and on the spot I requested M. Manouri to be good enough to come to Arpajon as soon as his engagements allowed it as I still needed his assistance in a matter of some slight importance, etc. The assembled Council read this letter, approved of it, and it was sent.

M. Manouri came a few days later. The Superior explained the matter to him. He did not hesitate an instant before adopting her opinion. My scruples were treated as absurdities. It was agreed that the nuns of Longchamps should be summoned the very next day. They were. So despite everything, my name reappeared in reports, legal statements, and in court, and that with details, suppositions, and lies, and with every black slander which can prejudice a human creature in the mind of her judges and make her odious in the eyes of the people. But, my lord, are lawyers allowed to slander one as much as they like? Has one no redress against them? Had I been able to foresee all the bitterness this affair would bring along with it I protest that I should never have allowed its being begun. Care was taken to send several of our nuns the documents which were being published against me. At every moment they came and asked details about horrible incidents which had no shadow of existence in fact. The greater the ignorance I professed the guiltier they thought me. Because I explained nothing, admitted nothing, denied everything they thought everything was true. They smiled and spoke in a circumlocutory, but very wounding, fashion. They shrugged their shoulders at my supposed innocence. I wept and was miserable.

But troubles never come singly. The time for going to confession arrived. I had already accused myself of the first caresses the Superior had bestowed on me: the Director had very expressly forbidden me to go on accepting them. But how refuse things which afford the greatest satisfaction to the

person on whom one is completely dependent, expecially when one can see no harm in them?

As this Director is going to play a great part in the rest of my Memoirs I think you ought to know about him.

He is a Franciscan called Father Lemoine, and not more than forty-five. He has one of the handsomest faces to be found anywhere. When he is not thinking it is gentle, serene, open, smiling, and agreeable. But on occasions his brow becomes wrinkled, his eyebrows frown, his eyes fall, and his bearing becomes austere. I know no two men more different than Father Lemoine at the altar and Father Lemoine in the parlour, alone or in company. But that is the characteristic of all monastic persons. And I have caught myself at it several times on the way to the grille and stopped to readjust my veil and head-band, to compose my countenance, my eyes, my mouth, my hands, my arms, my expression and my walk, and take on a borrowed bearing and reserve which would last more or less long according to the company in which I found myself. Father Lemoine was tall, well-built, gay, and very amiable in his moments of forgetfulness; he talks marvellously. He has in this House the reputation of a great theologian; in the world of a great preacher. His society is delicious. He is very well informed on an infinity of subjects foreign to his calling. He has a very fine voice, knows history, music, and languages well. He is a doctor of the Sorbonne. Though young, he has held all the chief dignities of his order. I think he is neither an intriguer nor ambitious. He had asked to be made head of Estamps because it was a quiet post, where he could give himself over without being disturbed to some studies which he had undertaken. The choice of a confessor is a great thing for a nunnery. It should be directed by a man of mark and position. Everything was done to get Father Lemoine, and we had him on special occasions at any rate.

When he was to come on the eve of the great feasts he was sent the carriage belonging to the House. You would have to see in order to believe the stir which waiting for him produced in the whole community. They would all be as happy as possible and shut themselves up to work away at their self-examination and get ready to take up as much of his time as possible.

It was the eve of Pentecost and he was expected. I was uncomfortable. The Superior perceived it and spoke to me about it. I did not hide from her the reason why I was worried. She appeared even more alarmed than me, though she did her best to conceal it. She talked of Father Lemoine as an absurdity, laughed at my scruples, asked me if Father Lemoine knew more about the innocence of her feelings and mine than did our own consciences, and if mine reproached me with anything. I answered, “No.” “Very well,” she said; “I am your Superior; you owe me obedience, and I order you not to speak to him about such stupid things. It is useless your going to confession if you have only got trifles of that sort to tell.”

Meanwhile Father Lemoine arrived and I prepared myself for confession while those in more of a hurry had already got hold of him. My turn was approaching when the Superior came to me, pulled me aside, and said: “Saint Susan, I have been thinking over what you have said to me. Go back to your cell, I do not want you to go to confession to-day.”

“And why not, Mother?” I answered. “To-morrow is a great day, a day of general Communion. What would you have people think of me if I am the only one not to approach the Holy Table?”

“No matter. People can say what they like, but you shall not go to confession.”

“Mother,” I said, “if you really love me, do not mortify me in this way. I ask it you as a favour.”

“No, no; it is out of the question. You will get into difficulties with the man, and I do not want that to happen.”

“No, Mother, I shall not.”

“Promise me then … it is quite unnecessary, you shall come to my room to-morrow and accuse yourself to me. You have done nothing for which I cannot reconcile you with God and absolve you, and you will communicate with the rest. Be off …”

So I withdrew and remained unhappily in my cell, distressed and moody, not knowing what plan to adopt, whether I should go to Father Lemoine in spite of the Superior, whether I should be satisfied with to-morrow’s absolution and make my devotions with the rest of the House, or whether I should abstain from the Sacraments, whatever people might say.

When she returned she had been confessed and Father Lemoine had asked why he had not seen me and if I were ill. I do not know what answer she had made, but the end of it all was that Father Lemoine was expecting me in the confessional.

“So go, if you must, but promise me that you will hold your tongue.” I hesitated, and she insisted.

“You silly creature,” she said, “what harm can you find in keeping quiet about something that is not wrong?”

“Then what is the harm in telling it?”

“No harm, only inconvenience. Who knows the importance that that man might attach to it? Now, promise me.”

I still wavered, but finally I promised to say nothing about it if I was not directly asked, and went off. I confessed and said nothing about it, but when the Director interrogated me directly I hid nothing. He put me a thousand singular questions, which I still cannot understand as I recall them. He treated me indulgently, but expressed himself about the Superior in terms which made me tremble. He called her an unworthy libertine, a bad nun, a

corrupted soul, and enjoined me on pain of mortal sin never to be alone with her or to tolerate any of her caresses.

"But, Father," I said, "she is my Superior, she can come into my room and call me into hers whenever she likes."

"I know, I know, and I am miserable about it. Dear child, God be praised for having saved you up to now. I dare not explain myself more clearly for fear of becoming myself the accomplice of your Superior and of withering by the poisonous breath which would issue from my lips despite myself, a delicate flower which has only remained till your age fresh and spotless by the special protection of Providence. But I bid you fly from your Superior, repel her caresses, never go to her room alone, close your door to her, especially at night, leave your bed if she comes in despite your efforts, go into the corridor and call for help, if need be, descend naked to the foot of the altar, fill the House with your cries, and do everything that the love of God, the fear of crime, your Holy State and interest in your salvation would suggest to you if Satan himself came up to you and pursued you. Yes, my child, Satan. Such are the colours in which I am compelled to portray your Superior to you. She has sunk into the abyss of crime and is trying to pull you in after her. Perhaps you would be there already had your very innocence not filled her with terror and stayed her."

Then, raising his eyes to Heaven, he cried out:

"Oh! Lord, continue to protect this child … Say after me: *Satana, vade retro, apage, Satana.* If the wretched woman questions you tell her everything, repeat what I have said to you. Tell her it were better that she had not been born, or that she should fall alone into hell by a violent death."

"But, Father," I replied, "you have heard her yourself an instant ago."

He made no reply, but, sighing deeply, he rested his arms against one of the walls of the confessional and laid his head upon them as one overcome with grief. He remained some time in this state. I did not know what to

think: my knees trembled. I was in an inconceivable state of distress and disorder. I was like a traveller walking in darkness between precipices he cannot see and attacked on all sides by subterranean voices crying: “It is all over with you!” Then looking at me with an expression calm but pitiful, he said:

“Is your health good?”

“Yes, Father.”

“You would not be too much upset by a sleepless night?”

“No, Father.”

“Very well. You shall not go to bed to-night. Immediately after you have had your food you will go into chapel and fall at the foot of the altar, where you will pass the night in prayer. You do not understand the danger which you have run. Thank God for having kept you safe. And to-morrow you will approach the Holy Table with the other nuns. Your only penance will be to keep away from the Superior and to repel her poisoned caresses. Go. For my part, I shall join my prayers to yours. I am aware of all the consequences of the advice I am giving you, but I owe it to you, and I owe it to myself. God is master and we have but one law.”

I recall, my lord, but very imperfectly, everything he said to me. Now that I compare what he said as I have described it to you with the terrible impression it made on me, there can be no comparison. But this comes from the fact that it is broken up and disconnected. A great deal has been left out; I cannot remember it because I had no clear idea of it at the time and did not, and still do not, attach any importance to things against which he declaimed with the greatest violence. What, for instance, did he find so extraordinary in the scene with the harpsichord? Are there not people on whom music makes the most violent impression? I am told that certain tunes, certain variations and modulations used entirely to alter my expression, and that on these occasions I would be quite beside myself and

hardly know what was happening to me. But I do not think I was the less innocent for that. Why should it not have been the same with the Superior, who was certainly, for all her foolishness and unreliable disposition, one of the most sensitive women in the world? She could not hear a story which was the least bit sad without bursting into tears. When I told her my own story the state to which I reduced her was pitiful. Why did he not make a crime out of her sympathy as well? And the scene at night, of which he awaited the issue with mortal terror … Certainly the man is too severe.

However that may be, I executed his orders exactly, the immediate consequences of which he had no doubt foreseen. The moment I left the confessional I went and fell at the foot of the altar. My head was turned by terror. I remained there till supper. The Superior, anxious about what had happened to me, had sent for me, but she had been told that I was praying. She appeared several times at the door of the choir, but I pretended not to see her. The supper-bell sounded. I went back to the refectory and took my supper hastily. As soon as I had finished I returned to chapel. I did not appear at the evening recreation. At the hour for retiring and going to bed I did not go up. The Superior was well aware what had happened to me. The night was far advanced, everything was quiet in the House, when she came down to me. I retraced in my imagination the picture the confessor had drawn of her. I trembled all over and dared not look at her, thinking I should see her with hideous countenance and enveloped in flames. I said within myself: "*Satana, vade retro, apage, Satana.* Oh! Lord, save me and withdraw from me this demon."

She knelt down, and after praying for some time said: "Saint Susan, what are you doing here?"

"You can see, Madam."

"Do you know what time it is?"

"Yes, Madam."

“Why did you not go to your room at the retreat hour?”

“Because I was putting myself in the mood to celebrate the great day to-morrow.”

“Then you intended to pass the night here?”

“Yes, Madam.”

“And who gave you permission?”

“The Director ordered it.”

“The Director can order nothing against the rule of the House, and I order you to go to bed.”

“Madam, it is the penance imposed on me.”

“You will replace it with other good works.”

“It is not my choice.”

“Now, child,” she said, “come along. The coldness of the chapel at night will make you ill. You will pray in your cell.”

Then she wished to take me by the hand, but I withdrew it quickly.

“You are avoiding me,” she said.

“Yes, Madam, I am avoiding you.”

Reassured by the sanctity of the place, the presence of the Divinity, and the innocence of my own heart, I dared to raise my eyes to her. But scarcely had I looked at her when I uttered a loud cry and began to rush about in the choir like a mad thing, crying: “Keep away from me, Satan.” She did not follow me, but remained where she was, and said to me gently, stretching out her arms to me and in the most touching and gentle voice:

“What is the matter? Whence this terror? Stop. I am not Satan, but your Superior and your friend.”

I stopped, turned my head towards her again, and saw that I had been frightened by an extraordinary atmospheric effect to which my imagination had given reality, and that she had been standing in relation to the chapel lamp in such a position that only her face and the ends of her hands were

lighted and the rest was in shadow, all of which gave her a singular aspect. Having gained a little self-control, I dropped into a stall. She was coming up to sit in the next one when I rose and sat in the one below. So I went from stall to stall, and she also, till the last one. There I stopped and implored her to leave at least one stall empty between herself and me.

"Gladly," she said.

We both sat down, a stall separating us. Then the Superior broke the silence by saying:

"Might one know, Saint Susan, whence comes this terror which my presence causes you?"

"Mother," I said to her, "forgive me: it is not I, but Father Lemoine. He paints in the most awful colours your tenderness for me and your caresses, though I admit I see no harm in them. He told me to avoid you, never to go into your room alone, and to leave mine if you came in. He has portrayed you to my mind as the demon. I cannot tell what he did not say to me on the subject."

"So you spoke to him?"

"No, Mother, but I could not help answering his questions."

"So now I am revolting in your eyes?"

"No, Mother, I could never help loving you, and appreciating all the worth of your kindness, and asking you to continue it. But I shall obey my Director."

"So you will no longer come and see me?"

"No, Mother."

"Nor admit me to your room?"

"No, Mother."

"You will repel my caresses?"

"It will cost me a pang, for I have a tender nature and like to be caressed. But it must be so. I have made the promise to my Director, and I have

sworn it at the foot of the altar. If only I could imitate the manner in which he explains his meaning! He is a pious man, an enlightened man. What interest could he have in pointing out dangers where none are, in alienating the heart of a nun from that of her Superior? But perhaps he sees in actions very innocent on both our parts a germ of secret corruption which he thinks developed in you and fears may develop in me. And I will not hide from you that in thinking over the sensations I have sometimes felt.… Whence comes it, Mother, that after leaving you and going to my own room I am agitated and moody? Whence comes it that I can neither pray nor settle down to anything? Whence comes a kind of boredom which I have never experienced before? Why do I feel sleepy, I who have never slept during the day? I thought you had some contagious disease which was beginning to operate in me. But Father Lemoine looks at it quite differently."

"And how does he look at it?"

"He sees everything black and criminal, your ruin consummated, mine projected. I do not know."

"Come, come," she said, "your Father Lemoine is a visionary. This is not the first onslaught of the kind which he has made on me. I have only got to get really fond of somebody for him to try and upset her. A little more and he would have driven poor Saint Theresa mad. I am beginning to be tired of it, and I shall get rid of the man. Besides, he lives thirty miles off; it is very inconvenient bringing him over, and then one can't have him when one wants. But we will talk of that at our leisure. So you will not go up?"

"No, Mother, I ask the favour of being allowed to pass the night here. If I failed in this duty, to-morrow I should not dare approach the sacraments with the rest of the community. But you, Mother, will you communicate?"

"Certainly."

"Then Father Lemoine has said nothing to you about it?"

"No."

“But how can that be?”

“Because he has not had occasion to talk to me of it. One only goes to confession to accuse oneself of one’s sins; and I see none in my tender love for such a lovable girl as Saint Susan. If fault there were, it would be in concentrating on her alone a sentiment that should be distributed over all those who make up the community. But that does not depend on me. I cannot help seeing merit where it exists or feeling a preference for it. I ask forgiveness of God and cannot understand how your Father Lemoine can see my damnation sealed in a partiality so natural and so difficult to guard against. I try to make everybody happy, but there are some I love and esteem above the others, because they are more lovable and estimable. That is all my crime with you amounts to, Saint Susan. Do you think it a grave one?”

“No, Mother.”

“Then, my dear child, let us each pray a little more and retire.”

I besought her again to let me pass the night in chapel. She agreed on the condition that it did not happen again, and withdrew.

I thought over what she had said to me. I asked God to enlighten me. After reflecting, I came to the conclusion that, all things considered, even when people were of the same sex, there might be at least some indecency in the manner in which they showed their friendship: that Father Lemoine, who was an austere man, had perhaps exaggerated, but that his advice to show extreme reserve towards the excessive familiarity of my Superior might profitably be followed, and I promised myself to do so.

Two important incidents happened with but few days’ interval. The first was that I won my case against the nuns of Longchamps. They were condemned to pay the nuns of Saint Eutropia, where I was, an income proportionate to my dowry. The other was that the Director was changed. The Superior herself informed me of this last event. However, I no longer

went to her room unaccompanied. She no longer came alone to mine. She was always on the look-out for me, but I avoided her. She noticed it and reproached me for it. I do not know what was going on in her mind, but it must have been something extraordinary. She got up at night and walked about the corridors, particularly mine, and I heard her passing and repassing, stopping at my door, sighing and lamenting. I trembled and buried myself in my bed. By day, if I was walking or in the work- or recreation-room and placed in such a manner that I could not see her, she passed whole hours gazing at me. She spied on my slightest actions. If I went downstairs I found her at the bottom: she was waiting for me at the top when I went up again. One day she stopped me and began looking at me without saying a word. Tears flowed abundantly from her eyes; then suddenly falling on the ground and clasping my knees between her hands, she said:

"Cruel Sister, ask for my life and I will give it, but do not avoid me. I cannot live without you."

Her condition distressed me. Her eyes were dull. She had lost her plumpness and bright complexion. She was my Superior: she was at my feet, her head against my knees, which she held in her embrace. I held out my hands to her. She took them ardently, kissed them, and then looked at me again. I lifted her up. She swayed and could scarcely walk. I led her back to her cell. When the door was open she took me by the hand and pulled me gently to make me go in, but without speaking to me or looking at me.

"No," I said: "Mother, no, I have made a promise to myself. It is best for you and for me. I occupy too much place in your heart; and that is so much lost for God, to whom you owe it entirely."

"Is it that with which you reproach me?"

I tried, as I spoke, to free my hand.

“So you will not come in?” she said.

“No, Mother, no.”

“You do not want to, Saint Susan. You do not know what may happen. No, you do not know. You will kill me.”

These last words had on me an effect contrary to that which she had intended. I withdrew my hand hastily and retired. She returned, watched me for a few paces, then, going back into her cell, the door of which remained open, she began to utter the most piercing wails. I heard them and my heart melted. I was for a moment doubtful whether I should continue on my way or go back to her. Owing to some feeling of natural aversion, I went on, but not without grief for the state in which I left her. I have a sympathetic nature. I shut myself in, and felt extremely uncomfortable; I could settle down to nothing. I took several turns up and down my cell, distracted and worried. I went out and came back again. Finally I went and knocked at the door of my neighbour, Saint Theresa, whom I found in close conversation with another young nun who was a friend of hers. I said to her:

‘Sister, I am sorry to interrupt you. But please listen to me for a moment; I have something to say to you.”

She followed me back to my cell, and I said:

“I do not know what is the matter with our Mother Superior. She is so miserable. Perhaps if you went to see her you could cheer her up.”

She made no answer, but left her friend where she was, shut the door, and ran off to the Superior.

But the state of the woman got daily worse. She became melancholy and grave. She suddenly lost her high spirits, which had been unfailing since my arrival. The discipline became extremely severe. The services were performed with befitting dignity, strangers almost entirely excluded from the parlour, the nuns forbidden to go into each other’s cells, our exercises reinstituted with the most scrupulous exactness, no more assemblies with

the Superior, no more refreshments, the smallest faults severely punished. I was still sometimes approached to obtain a pardon, but I absolutely refused to ask for it. The cause of this revolution was known to everyone. The old ones were rather pleased; the young people were in despair and looked at me with hostile eyes. But my conscience was at rest, and I paid no attention to their ill-humour and reproaches.

The Superior, whom I could neither console nor help pitying, passed successively from melancholy to piety, and from piety to raving. I will not follow her through these various stages. They would land me in unending details. I will only say that, in her first state, she sometimes sought me out and sometimes avoided me. Sometimes she treated us all with her accustomed gentleness; sometimes again she changed suddenly to an exaggerated strictness: she would call for us and then send us back again; announce recreation, and a moment later revoke her orders; summon us to the choir, and just as we were obeying her orders the bell would ring again for us to shut ourselves up. It is difficult to imagine the disturbed life we led. Our day passed in leaving our cells and going back again; in taking up our breviaries and putting them down; in going upstairs and downstairs; in raising and lowering our veils. Night was almost as much interrupted as day.

Some nuns addressed me and tried to make me understand that if I would show a little more complaisance and consideration for the Superior all would return to its accustomed order. They should have said disorder. I answered:

“I am sorry for you, but tell me clearly what I ought to do.”

Some went away with bent heads, making no reply. Others gave me advice it was impossible to reconcile with that of the Director – I mean the one who had been removed, for we had not yet seen his successor.

The Superior no longer left her room at night, and passed whole weeks without showing herself at service, in the choir, in the refectory, or at recreation. She remained shut up in her room, wandered about the corridors, or went down to chapel. She would knock at the nuns' doors and say to them in a plaintive tone:

"Sister So-and-so, pray for me."

The rumour grew that she was preparing for a general confession.

One day, when I was the first to go down to chapel, I saw a paper attached to the veil of the grille. I went up to it and read:

"Sisters, you are asked to pray for a nun who has wandered from her duties and wishes to return to God." I was tempted to tear it down, but I left it there. Some days later there was another one on which was written:

"Sisters, you are asked to implore the pity of God for a nun who has recognized her aberrations. They are great."

Another day there was a third request:

"Sisters, you are asked to pray God to remove the despair of a nun who has lost all confidence in the divine pity."

All these requests, in which were pictured the cruel vicissitudes of a soul in pain, deeply grieved me. Once I remained a considerable time before one of these notices. I asked myself what these aberrations were with which she reproached herself: whence came the terrors of the woman, with what she had to blame herself? I went back to the exclamations of the Director, recalled his expressions, tried to find some sense in them, found none, and remained as it were absorbed. Some nuns who were looking at me were talking together, and, if I am not mistaken, looked on me as immediately threatened with the same terrors.

The poor Superior no longer appeared but with lowered veil; took no more part in the management of the House, spoke to nobody, and had frequent conferences with the new Director who had been given us. He was

a young Benedictine. Perhaps it was he who imposed all the mortifications which she practised. She fasted three days a week, scourged herself, heard service in the lower stalls. One had to pass her door to go to chapel. We found her prostrated there, her face to the ground, and she only got up when there was no longer anyone there. At night she came down in her shift, with bare feet. If Saint Theresa or myself happened to meet her, she turned round and glued her face to the wall. One day as I was leaving my cell I found her prostrated, with arms stretched out and face to the ground, and she said to me:

"Come and trample me underfoot. I deserve no other treatment."

During the months which her illness lasted the rest of the community had time to get sorry for her and form an aversion for me. I will not dwell once more on the sad plight of a nun who is hated by the House: you ought to know all about it by now. I felt reviving in me, bit by bit, my old distaste for my condition. I brought this distaste and my sufferings before the new Director. He was called Dom Morel. He was a man of ardent temperament and about forty years old. He seemed to listen to me with attention and interest. He desired to know every incident of my life, and made me go into the minutest details of my family, my tastes, my character, the Houses in which I had been, that in which I was, and everything which had passed between the Superior and myself. I hid nothing from him. He did not seem to attach as much importance as did Father Lemoine to the conduct of the Superior with me: he scarcely deigned to say a few words about it. He regarded the matter as finished. What interested him more were my secret feelings about the religious life. The more I opened myself to him, the more confidential he became in return. If I confessed to him, he confided in me. What he said of his sufferings was in complete conformity with what I had felt myself. He had entered into religion despite himself. He had the same distaste for his condition and was scarcely less to be pitied than I.

“But, Sister,” he added, “what is to be done? We have but one resource, which is to make our position as little distressing as possible.”

Then he advised me to follow the plans of life which he had adopted for himself. They were wise.

“With that,” he added, “we do not avoid suffering; we merely bring ourselves to tolerate it. Truly religious people are happy only in so far as they make for themselves before God a virtue of their crosses. Then they rejoice and go to meet their mortifications half way. The bitterer and more frequent these mortifications are the more they rejoice. It is the exchange they make of present happiness for happiness to come. They assure themselves of one by the voluntary sacrifice of the other. When they have greatly suffered they say to God: ‘*Amplius Domine*, still more, O Lord’; and such a prayer God rarely fails to grant. But if these sufferings exist for you and me as for them, we cannot promise ourselves the same recompense: we have not got the one thing which might give them value, which is resignation. This is sad. Alas! How can I inspire you with the virtue you lack and which I do not possess myself? Yet without it we are in danger of being lost in the next world after having been wretched in this. In the midst of our penance we damn ourselves almost as surely as does the world amidst its pleasures. We deny ourselves, they enjoy themselves, and after this life the same tortures await us both. How painful is the position of a monk or nun without vocation! Such, however, is ours, and we cannot change it. We have been loaded with heavy chains which we shake unceasingly and cannot hope to break. Let us try, Sister, to draw them after us. Have no fear. I will come back and see you.”

He returned some days later. I saw him in the parlour and examined him more nearly. Finally he had told me all about his life and I had told him all about mine, going into a mass of detail which served only to emphasize the similarity of our conditions. He had undergone almost the same domestic

and religious persecution as I had. I did not perceive that the picture he drew of the distaste he felt for his life was hardly calculated to dissipate my own. But this was the effect it produced on me, and I think that the picture I drew produced the same effect on him. Thus it came about that the resemblance of character aiding resemblance of experience, the more we saw of each other the more we liked each other. The story of his trials was the story of mine; the story of his feelings was the story of mine; the story of his soul was the story of mine.

When we had talked at length about ourselves we also used to talk about other people, and particularly about the Superior. His position as Director made him very reserved. But still I deduced from what he said that her present condition would not be permanent, that she was struggling against herself, but uselessly; and that one of two things would happen. She would either return at once to her former proclivities or lose her reason. I was extremely curious to know more. He could have enlightened me on the questions I had put myself and been unable to answer, but I did not dare question him. I only summoned up courage to ask him if he knew Father Lemoine.

"Yes," he said, "I know him, he is a man of worth, of great worth."

"We suddenly stopped having him here."

"That is so."

"Could you not tell me how that happened?"

"I should be sorry if it were known."

"You can count on my discretion."

"They wrote to the Archbishop against him, I think."

"And what could they say?"

"That he lived too far off; could not come when he was wanted; was too austere a disciplinarian; that there was some reason to suspect him of

innovating opinions; that he sowed division in the House and came between the nuns and their Superior."

"And how do you know that?"

"From himself."

"You see him, then?"

"Yes, I see him. He has more than once spoken of you to me."

"And what did he say about me?"

"That you were much to be pitied, that he did not understand how you could have held out against all the sufferings you have undergone; that he had only once or twice had occasion to speak to you; but that he did not think you could ever accommodate yourself to the religious life; that he had in mind …"

There he stopped short, and I added:

"What did he have in mind?"

"The confidence is too strict a one for me to be able to say more."

I did not insist and merely added:

"It was certainly M. Lemoine who came between me and the Superior."

"He did well."

"And why?"

"Sister," he answered, taking on a grave expression, "follow his advice and try to be ignorant of the reasons for it as long as you live."

"But it seems to me that if I knew the danger I should be the more attentive to avoid it."

"The opposite might perhaps be the case."

"You must have a very poor opinion of me."

"I have the only possible opinion of your morals and your innocence. But believe me there is a terrible kind of knowledge that you could not acquire without ruin. It was your very innocence which impressed your

Superior. Had you been better instructed she would have respected you less."

"I do not understand you."

"So much the better."

"But can the caresses and familiarities of one woman be dangerous to another?"

There was no answer from Dom Morel.

"Am I not the same as when I arrived here?"

There was no answer from Dom Morel.

"Should I not have continued to be the same? Where, then, is the harm of loving, of saying so, and testifying to it? It is so sweet."

"That is true," said Dom Morel, raising his eyes to me after having kept them lowered while I was speaking.

"Is sweetness then so common in religious houses? My poor Superior, to what a state has she fallen!"

"It is very bad, and I fear it may get worse. She is not made for her state. That is what happens sooner or later to those who run counter to the proclivities of their nature. Constraint diverts them to irregular passions, which are all the more violent for being ill-founded. It is a sort of madness."

"She is mad, then?"

"Yes, she is and will become more so."

"And do you think that such a fate awaits all those who find themselves in a state to which they were not called?"

"Not all. There are those who die first. There are those whose flexible character eventually yields. There are those whom vague hope sustains for a long time."

"And what hope can a nun have?"

"Why, first to break her vows."

"And when that hope is lost?"

“Then she hopes to find the doors open one day, and that men will abandon the absurdity of shutting lively young creatures in sepulchres and that convents will be abolished; or that the House will catch fire; that the walls of the cloister will collapse; or that someone will come to her help. All these suppositions revolve in her mind. The nuns talk it over among themselves. While walking in the gardens they unconsciously look to see if the walls are after all so high: in their cell, they absent-mindedly seize the bars of the grille and shake them gently. If the street is under the windows, they look out at it. If they hear anyone pass, their heart thumps and they sigh dimly for a liberator. If there is any noise which penetrates into the House, they are full of hope. They count on an illness which will put them in touch with a man or end in their being sent off to take the waters.”

“True, true,” I cried; “you are reading into the depths of my heart. I have built and still build up these illusions.”

“And when reflection destroys them, for the healthful vapours with which the heart endows the reason are from time to time dissipated, then they see all the depths of their misery. They detest themselves; they detest everyone else; they weep, cry out, and feel the approaches of despair. Then some rush to fall at the knees of the Superior and find consolation there. Others prostrate themselves in their cells or at the foot of the altar and call on Heaven to help them. Others tear their clothes or pull out their hair; some look for a deep pit, high windows, or a noose, and sometimes find it. Some, after long self-torture, fall into a sort of brutishness and remain idiots. Others, of a feeble and delicate constitution, are consumed by langour. The organization of others is disturbed and they become raving. Those are happiest in whom the same consoling illusions are reborn and flatter them almost to the tomb; their life is divided between error and despair.”

“And the most unfortunate,” I added, apparently with a deep sigh, “are those who experience all those states of mind in turn … Oh, Father! how sorry I am that I have listened to you.”

“And why?”

“I did not know myself, now I do. My illness will be less lasting. At moments …”

I was going to continue when another nun came in, then a second and a third, then four, five, or six – I do not know how many. The conversation became general. Some looked at the Director, others listened silently with lowered eyes. Several questioned him at the same time, and all exclaimed at the wisdom of his answers. Meanwhile I had retired into a corner and given myself up to deep meditation. In the middle of this conversation, where each one tried to show off and attract to herself the preference of the holy man by appearing in the most favourable light, some one was heard slowly approaching, stopping at intervals and sighing. They listened and whispered: “It is she; it is our Superior.” Then they all sat round in silence. And she, in fact, it was. She came in, her veil falling to her waist, her arms crossed over her chest, and her head drooping. I was the first one she saw. Immediately she withdrew from under her veil one of her hands with which she covered her eyes, and, turning a little to one side, she signed to us all to go out together. We went out silently, and she remained alone with Dom Morel.

I foresee, my lord, that you are going to form a bad opinion of me; but, since I was not ashamed of what I did, why should I blush to admit it? And then how suppress in this story an event which was not without important consequences? Let us say, then, that I have a peculiar turn of mind. When what I am describing is likely to excite your esteem or increase your sympathy, I write perhaps well, perhaps badly, but with an incredible swiftness and facility; my soul is cheerful, expression comes to me without

difficulty, my tears flow gently; it seems to me that you are with me, that I see you and that you are listening to me. If, on the contrary, I am compelled to exhibit myself to you in an unfortunate light, I think with difficulty, I cannot express myself, my pen runs badly, the very nature of my handwriting changes, and I can only go on because I secretly flatter myself that you will not read these parts of my story. Here is one of them.

When all the Sisters had withdrawn, "Well, what did you do?" – Can't you guess? No, you are too high-minded for that. I went downstairs on tiptoe and took up my position at the parlour door to listen to what was being said there. "That is very bad," you will say. Well, yes it was, very bad; I said so to myself, and my agitation, the precautions I took not to be seen, the number of times I stopped, the voice of my conscience urging me at each step to go back, never allowed me to doubt it. But my curiosity was too strong and I went on. But if it is wrong to try and overhear the conversations of two people, is it not still worse to pass it on to you? This is one of those parts of my story which I can only write because I flatter myself that you will not read it, not that that is true, but I have to persuade myself.

The first word I heard after quite a long silence made me tremble all over. It was:

"Father, I am damned."

I reassured myself and listened. The veil which had hidden from my eyes the dangers I had run was being torn off, when I was called away. I had to go, so I went. But alas! I had heard all too much. What a woman, my lord, what an abominable woman! …

[Here the memoirs of Sister Susan stop. What follows is only a rough sketch of what she intended to say in the rest of her story. Apparently the Superior went mad, and the fragments which I am going to transcribe can only refer to her unfortunate state of mind.]

After this confession we had several days of peace. Joy returned to the community, and I received compliments which I angrily rejected. She no longer avoided me; she would look at me, but my presence no longer seemed to disturb her. I did my best to hide the horror which she inspired in me since by my fortunate or fatal curiosity I had got to know her better.

Soon she became silent and said nothing but “Yes” or “No”. She walks about alone. She refuses food. Her blood is fired, fever attacks her, and delirium follows on fever.

Alone in bed, she sees me, talks to me, asks me to come and stand beside her, addresses me the tenderest remarks. If she hears steps round her room she cries: “It is she who is going by. I recognize her step. Let her be called in … No, no, let her be.”

The curious thing is that she never made a mistake, taking another for me.

She would laugh out loud and next moment burst into tears. The Sisters used to stand round her silently, and some wept with her.

Suddenly she would say: “I have not been to chapel. I have not said my prayers. I want to get out of bed. I want to dress. Let me dress.” If her wishes were opposed she added: “At any rate, give me my prayer-book.” She would be given it, open it, turn over the pages with her finger, and continue to do so when she had got to the end, while her eyes wandered.

One night she went down to chapel alone. Some of the Sisters followed her; she prostrated herself on the steps of the altar, began to groan, sigh, and pray out loud. She went out and came back again. She said: “Go and look for her. Such a pure soul! Such an innocent creature! If she would join her prayers with mine!” Then, addressing the whole community and turning towards the empty stalls, she cried: “Go away, go away, all of you. Let her remain alone with me! You are not worthy to come near her. If your voices mingled with hers your profane incense would corrupt the sweetness of hers

in the sight of God. Withdraw! Withdraw!" Then she exhorted me to ask help and forgiveness of Heaven. She saw God. Heaven appeared to her furrowed with lightning, opening and thundering over her head, angels descended in anger, the looks of the Divinity made her tremble. She ran wildly round, buried herself in the darkest corners of the chapel, appealed for pity, glued her face to the ground, drowsiness overcame her, the cold damp of the place seized her, and she was carried into her cell like one dead.

She was quite ignorant next day of this terrible scene during the night. She said: "Where are the Sisters? I never see anyone now. I am left alone in this House. They have all abandoned me, Saint Theresa as well. They are quite right. Since Saint Susan is no longer there I can go out, I shall not meet her … Oh! if I could meet her. But she is no longer there, is she? She is no longer there? Happy the House which owns her! She will tell everything to the new Superior! What will be thought of me then? … Is Saint Theresa dead? I have heard the death-knell tolling all night. Poor girl! She is lost for ever, and it's my fault, my fault! One day I shall be confronted with her. What shall I say to her? What shall I answer her? … Woe to her! Woe to me!"

At another moment she said: "Have the Sisters come back? Tell them that I am very ill … Lift up my pillows … Unlace me … I feel something oppressing me here. My head is burning. Take off my coifs … I want to wash … Bring me water … Pour it out … More … They are white, but my soul is still soiled; I wish I were dead. I wish I had never been born, I should not have seen her."

One morning she was found barefooted, in her shift, with her hair undone, howling, foaming at the mouth, and rushing round her cell, with her eyes shut and her body pressed against the wall … "Go away from this gulf. Do you hear those cries? They come from Hell. I see flames rising

from that deep abyss. From amid those fires I hear confused voices calling me … O Lord, have pity on me! Quick, ring the bell, summon the community. Tell them to pray for me. I shall pray as well … But it is scarcely day, the Sisters are asleep … I have not closed my eyes all night, I should like to close my eyes but cannot."

One of the Sisters said:

"Madam, you have some private grief. Confide it to me, that will console you, perhaps."

"Sister Agatha, listen to me. Come close up … closer … closer still … No one must hear us. I am going to tell you everything, everything, but keep my secret for me … You have seen her?"

"Whom, Madam?"

"Is it not true that no one is as sweet as she? Such a walk! Such reserve! Such nobility! Such modesty! Go to her … Tell her … No, say nothing, don't go … You could not get near her. Heavenly angels guard her, they watch over her. I have seen them, you would see them, you would be frightened as I was. Stay here. Suppose you went, what could you say to her? Invent something at which she might not blush …"

"But, Madam, if you consulted your Director …"

"Yes, why yes … No, no I know what he will tell me, I have heard it all already … What should I talk to him about? … If I could only lose my memory! If I could only return into nothingness, or be born again! Do not call the Director, I would rather be read the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ … Read … I am beginning to breathe again … It only needs one drop of blood to purify me. Look, it gushes forth boiling from His Side. Incline the sacred wound above my head … His blood flows over me, but does not rest there … I am lost. Take down that crucifix. Bring it me."

It was brought to her. She clasped it in her arms, kissed it all over, and added: "Her eyes, her lips. When shall I see her again? Sister Agatha, tell

her I love her. Describe my condition to her. Tell her I am dying …"

She was bled and baths given her, but the remedies seemed to increase her ills. I dare not describe to you all the indecent gestures that she made or the dishonourable remarks that escaped her in her delirium. Continually she put her hand to her forehead as though to drive off evil thoughts and images. Heaven knows what images! She buried her head in her bed and covered her face with the sheets. "It is the Tempter!" she said. "It is he. What a strange form he has taken on! Get the Holy Water … Throw the Holy Water over me! Stop! Stop! He has gone!"

She was soon sequestered. But her prison was not so well guarded that she did not succeed one day in escaping. She had torn her clothes to pieces and was running naked about the corridors, with but two ends of broken rope descending from her arms. She cried out: "I am your Superior. You have all taken your oath! You must obey me! You have imprisoned me, you wretches! This is the way you repay my kindness. You insult me because I am too kind-hearted. I shall not be so again … Fire … Murder … Thieves … Help … Help, Sister Theresa; Help, Sister Susan …" Meanwhile they had laid hands on her and she was led back to prison, and she said: "You are right, you are right. Alas! I have gone mad, I feel it."

Sometimes she seemed obsessed with the spectacle of different tortures. She saw women with ropes round their necks, or their hands tied behind their backs, and others with torches in their hands; she joined those who were making public confession. She thought she was being led off to death, and said to the executioner: "I have deserved my fate, I have deserved it. If only this torture were my last. But in eternity! An eternity of flames! …"

I am saying nothing here which is not true. But I could add a great deal more which I have either forgotten or else blush to soil the paper with. After living several months in this deplorable condition she died. What a death, my lord! I saw her; I saw that terrible image of despair and crime at her last

hour! She thought herself surrounded by infernal spirits. They were awaiting her soul to seize it. She said in a choking voice: “There they are! There they are!” – and as she warded them off on each side of her with a crucifix, which she held in her hand, she howled and cried: “God … God!” Sister Theresa soon followed her, and we had another Superior, an old woman who was a mass of bad temper and superstition.

I am accused of having bewitched her predecessor; she believes it, and my troubles begin again. The new Director is similarly persecuted by his Superiors and persuades me to fly.

My flight is planned. I go into the garden between eleven and midnight. Cords are thrown me and I tie them round me. They break and I fall. My legs are torn and my loins bruised. A second and a third attempt and I am on the top of the wall. I descend. What is my astonishment when, instead of the post-chaise which I had hoped to find, I perceive a poor public conveyance. I am on the road to Paris with a young Benedictine. I was not slow to perceive from the indecent tone he adopted and the liberties he allowed himself that none of the stipulated conditions were being observed. Then I began to regret my cell and to feel all the horror of my situation. Here I shall describe the scene in the cab. What a scene! What a man! I scream. The cabman comes to my rescue. Violent quarrel between the cabman and the monk.

I reach Paris. The cab stops in a little street at a narrow door opening into an obscure and dirty alley. The mistress of the house comes to meet me and installs me on the top floor in a little room containing most of the furniture necessary. I receive the visits of the woman who occupies the first floor.

“You are young and must be bored; come down to my room. You will find a cheery company of men and women, not as charming but nearly as young as yourself. We are talking, playing, singing, and dancing – all sorts

of amusements. And if you turn the heads of all our cavaliers the ladies will be neither jealous nor angry. Come along!”

The woman who talked to me like this had a gentle look, a soft voice, and a very insinuating manner of speech.

I passed a fortnight in this house exposed to all the solicitations of my perfidious ravisher and to all the tumultuous scenes of an ill-reputed house, every moment on the look-out for the chance of escape.

One day it came. Night was far advanced. Had I been near my convent I should have gone back. I run, without knowing where. Some men stop me. Terror seizes me. I fall fainting with exhaustion at the door of a tallow-chandler’s shop. People come to my assistance. On regaining consciousness I find myself stretched out on a pallet, surrounded by several people. They asked me who I was, and I do not know what I said. I was given the servant of the house to take me back. I take her arm and we go off. We had already gone some distance when the girl said to me:

“I suppose you know where we are going?”

“No, child, to the workhouse, I suppose.”

“The workhouse? Are you really homeless?”

“Alas yes.”

“What have you done to be turned out at this hour? But here we are at the door of Saint Catherine’s. We will see if we can get anyone to open the door. In any case, do not be frightened; you shall not remain in the street, you shall sleep in my room.”

I return to the tallow-chandler’s. Horror of the servant when she sees that the skin has been torn off my legs by my fall when leaving the convent. I pass the night there. Next evening I return to Saint Catherine’s. I stay three days, after which I am told I must either go to the general workhouse or take the first situation which offers.

Dangers I ran at Saint Catherine's at the hands of the men and women there. For it is there, I am told, that the rakes and procuresses go for girls. Thought I foresaw want, this lent no sort of charm to the gross seductions to which I was exposed. I sell my small possessions and choose others more suitable to my condition.

I go into service with a washerwoman, where I now am. I take in linen and iron it. It is hard work; I am ill-fed and ill-lodged, and have a bad bed. But on the other hand I am humanely teated. The husband drives a cab; his wife is rather rough, but a good-hearted woman. I should be quite contented with my condition if I could hope to enjoy it peacefully.

I have learnt that the police have got hold of my ravisher and returned him to his Superiors. Poor man, he is more to be pitied than I. His attempt has got abroad, and you cannot know how cruelly monks punish any crime that causes a scandal. He will pass the rest of his life in a dungeon. So shall I if I am caught. But he will live longer than I shall.

I am suffering from my fall. My legs are swollen and I cannot walk. I work sitting down, as I can hardly stand upright. Meanwhile I am apprehensive about what will happen when I am well. What excuse shall I then have for not going out? And how dangerous it will be to show myself! Fortunately, I have heaps of time before me. My relatives, who cannot doubt I am at Paris, are certainly making every possible enquiry. I had meant to summon M. Manouri into my loft. But he is dead.

I live in perpetual alarm at the least noise I hear in the house, on the staircase, or in the street. Terror seizes me, I tremble like a leaf, my knees give way under me, my work falls from my hands. I hardly ever close my eyes at night. And if I do get to sleep I wake up continually, speak, call out, and scream. I cannot imagine how those round me have not guessed my secret.

My escape is apparently abroad. I expected it. One of my companions mentioned it yesterday and added some odious circumstances and reflections of the kind that cause pain. Happily she was hanging the wet washing on the lines, with her back to the lamp, and so could not observe my agitation. Still, my mistress, who had observed I was crying, said to me:

"What is the matter Mary?"

"Nothing," I answered.

"Good gracious," she added, "are you silly enough to cry about a bad nun, without morals or religion, who falls in love with a nasty monk and runs off from her convent with him? You must indeed be soft-hearted. She had only got to eat and drink, say her prayers, and sleep. She was very well where she was, and had only to stay there. If she had had to go down to the river three or four times with the weather what it is now she would soon have learnt to put up with her position!"

To which I answered that we could not tell what she had gone through. I had better have remained silent and then she would not have added: "Come, come! she's a body that God will punish." On this I bent over the table and remained there till my mistress said:

"But, Mary, what are you dreaming about? While you sleep the work stands still!"

I never had the spirit of the cloister, as appears from my conduct. But I have grown accustomed in religion to certain practices which I repeat mechanically. For instance, if a bell rings, I make the sign of the cross or go down on my knees. If anyone knocks at the door, I say "*Ave.*" If I am put a question, my answer always ends with "Yes or No, Mother, or Sister." If a stranger comes, my arms cross themselves over my chest, and, instead of curtsying, I bow. My companions burst out laughing and think it amuses me to imitate a nun. But their mistake cannot possibly last. My blunders will give me away and I shall be ruined.

My lord, help me quickly. Doubtless you will say to me: “Tell me what I can do for you.” This. I have no great ambitions and should like a place as lady’s-maid or housekeeper, or even as an ordinary servant, provided I could live in retirement in the country, in the depths of the provinces, with worthy people who do not have a large number of visitors. Wages are of no importance. Safety, rest, bread, and water. You may be sure that I shall give satisfaction. In my father’s house I learned to work and at the convent to obey. I am young and of a very mild disposition. When my legs are cured I shall have more than enough strength for my work. I can sew, spin, embroider, and wash clothes. When I was in the world I used to mend my own lace, and should soon get into it again. I am far from clumsy and should find nothing beneath me. I can sing, understand music, and can play the harpsichord sufficiently well to please any mother who had the taste for it. I could even give lessons to her children, but should fear to be betrayed by these signs of a careful upbringing. If I had to learn hairdressing I would find someone to teach me, and soon acquire this small accomplishment. My lord, a tolerable position if possible, or any sort of situation is all I need, and I ask for nothing more. You can answer for my morals, which are sound despite appearances. I am even religious. Ah, my lord, all my ills would be past and over, and I should no longer have anything to fear of men, had God not stayed my hand. That deep well at the end of the garden! How often have I visited it! – and only did not hurl myself in because I was allowed such complete liberty to do so. I know not what fate is in store for me. But if I must go back one day into a convent, of whatever kind, I answer for nothing. There are wells everywhere. But pity me, my lord, and save yourself in the future from long regrets.

P.S. – I am crushed with fatigue, in continual terror, and cannot sleep. I have just reread, while lying down, these memoirs which were hurriedly written. I perceive that quite unintentionally I have been in each line

truthful about my misfortunes but have greatly exaggerated my attractions. Can it be that we think men less moved by the picture of our sufferings than the image of our charms? Do we say to ourselves that it is easier to attract their fancy than to stir their hearts? I know them too little, and have studied myself too little, to say. Still, what would the noble lord, who is known as a man of exquisite tact, think if he were persuaded that I was appealing not to his benevolent but to his vicious instincts? This thought distresses me. Truly he would be wrong to impute to me personally an instinct common to all my sex. I am a woman, perhaps rather a coquette for all I know. But I am so naturally and without guile.

PREFACE TO THE PRECEDING WORK, TAKEN FROM THE CORRESPONDANCE LITTÉRAIRE OF M. GRIMM, 1770



THIS CHARMING MARQUIS had left at the beginning of the year 1759 to go and live on his estate in Normandy, near Caen. He had promised us to remain there only long enough to put his affairs in order; but his stay insensibly lengthened; he was with his children once more; he was fond of the local *curé*; he had become a gardening addict; and since an imagination as vivid as his required some object, he had suddenly become an ardent religious zealot. Despite this, he still loved us tenderly; but very likely we should never have seen him in Paris again, if he had not lost his two sons, one after the other. This event restored him to us about four years ago, after an absence of more than eight. His devotion has evaporated, as all things evaporate in Paris, and he is today more lovable than ever.

As we very much disliked losing him, we took counsel together, after having borne his absence for fifteen months, as to the best means of getting him back to Paris. The author of the preceding "Memoirs" recalled that just before his departure there had been much talk in society about a young nun at Longchamps who had made a legal appeal against her vows, into which she had been forced by her relations. This poor recluse so excited the interest of M. de Croismare that, without having seen her, knowing her name, or even ascertaining if the facts were true, he solicited in her favour all the Counsellors of the Grand' Chambre of the Paris Parliament. Despite this generous intervention, by some accident Susan Simonin lost her case, and her vows were pronounced valid. M. Diderot resolved to re-open the affair to our advantage. He pretended that the nun in question had had the luck to escape from the convent, and in consequence wrote in her name to

M. de Croismare to ask for help and protection. We had every hope of seeing him arrive as rapidly as possible to help his nun, or, if he saw through our plot at once, we were sure at any rate of a good subject for a laugh. But the matter took on a very different complexion, as you will see by the correspondence I am about to publish between M. Diderot or the pretended nun and the loyal and charming Marquis de Croismare, who never suspected our perfidy for an instant. It is this perfidy that has so long weighed upon our consciences. We passed supper-time reading out, amid shouts of laughter, letters intended to reduce our worthy Marquis to tears, and with the same shouts of laughter the answers of our worthy and generous friend. However, when we saw that the tender-hearted benefactor was getting too much interested in the fate of this unhappy friend, M. Diderot decided to let her die, preferring to cause the Marquis some distress rather than to risk tormenting him more cruelly by letting her live longer. On his return to Paris we confessed our iniquitous plot. He laughed at it, as you may well believe, and the misfortunes of the unhappy nun have served but to strengthen the ties uniting those who have survived her. But he never spoke of it to M. Diderot.

And now for a circumstance scarcely less singular. While this mystification went to the head of our friend in Normandy, the imagination of M. Diderot was similarly excited. He was persuaded that the Marquis would never admit a young person into his house without knowing her, and so began to write out in detail the story of our nun.

One day when he was entirely absorbed in his work one of our friends, D'Alainville, went to call on him and found him plunged in grief, with his face bathed in tears.

"What on earth is the matter?" said M. D'Alainville; "what a state you are in!"

“What is the matter?” answered Diderot; “I am making myself miserable with a story I am writing …”

It is certain that if he had completed that story, it would have become one of the truest, most interesting and most pathetic novels that we possess. One could not read a page of it without shedding tears; and yet there was no love-interest in it. It was a work of genius which at every point showed the strongest proof of the author’s imagination: a work of public and general utility, for it was the cruellest satire ever written on our cloisters. It was all the more insidious in that the first part was all eulogy. His young nun possessed an angelic devotion and, in her simple and feeling heart, preserved the sincerest respect for everything she had been taught to venerate. But this novel only ever existed in fragments and remained so; it is lost like an infinity of other productions of a rare man who would have immortalized himself by twenty masterpieces if, being a better husbander of his time, he had not squandered it on a thousand idlers, whom I shall cite at the Last Judgment, where they will have to answer before God for their crime.

(And I shall add, for I know M. Diderot a little myself, that he did in fact complete this novel and it is the very “Memoirs” you have just been reading, from which will be seen how important it is to distrust the eulogies of friends.)

This correspondence and repentance are all that we have left of our poor nun. You must remember that all these letters, and also those of the nun, were forged by this child of Belial, and that the letters of her generous protector are genuine and written in good faith, a truth of which we could hardly convince M. Diderot, who thought the Marquis and his friends must have been making fun of him.

From the nun to M. le Comte de Croixmar,
Governor of the Royal Military College

“A wretched woman, in whom M. le Marquis de Croixmar took some interest three years ago when he lived next door to the Royal Academy of Music, learns that he is at present residing at the Military College. She sends to find out if she can still count on his kindness, now that she is more to be pitied than ever. A word in reply, if possible: the situation is desperate. But it is important that the person who delivers this note should suspect nothing.”

Answer

“A mistake has arisen. The Marquis de Croismare in question is at present living at Caen.”

This note was written in the hand of a young person, whose services were employed throughout the correspondence. A messenger took it to the Military College and brought back the verbal answer. M. Diderot thought this first step necessary for several very good reasons. The nun appeared to mix up the two cousins and not to know exactly how to spell their name. Thus she learnt quite naturally that her protector was at Caen. Very likely the Governor of the Military College would quiz his cousin about the letter and send it on, which would give a very genuine air to our virtuous adventuress. The Governor, a most amiable man, like every one of his name, was as much distressed as we were by the absence of his cousin, and we hoped to make a conspirator of him. After getting his answer the nun wrote to Caen:

“Monsieur,

I do not know whom I am writing to. But in my present distress it is to you that I address myself, whoever you may be. If I have not been deceived at the Army College, and if you really are the generous Marquis whom I am seeking, I shall thank God. If you are not, I do not know what I shall do. But I shall take courage from the name you bear; I hope that you will succour an unhappy girl, for whom you, my lord, or another M. de

Croismare, not of the Army College, used your influence in an attempt she made two years ago to be quit of imprisonment for life, to which the cruelty of her parents had condemned her. Despair has just induced me to take a second step, of which you will doubtless have heard tell: I have escaped from my convent. I could no longer tolerate what I had to suffer there. And there remained to me only this method, or a greater crime still, by which to gain that liberty which I had sought from the fairness of the law. My lord, as you have been before my protector I hope my present situation will touch your heart and revive in you a feeling of pity. Perhaps you will think it is unbecoming of me to have recourse to an unknown man in circumstances like mine. Alas! my lord, if you but knew the state of friendlessness to which I am reduced, if you had any idea of the brutality with which all scandals are punished in religious houses, you would excuse me! But you have a feeling nature and you will be afraid of having on your conscience an innocent creature hurled into a dungeon for the rest of her life. Monsieur, do me the service I ask of you. It is a work of charity which you will remember with satisfaction as long as you live, and for which God will reward you in this world or the next. Above all, my lord, remember that I live in a state of perpetual alarm, and that I shall count the moments. My relations must suspect that I am at Paris. They are certainly making every possible effort to discover my whereabouts. Do not allow them the time to find me. I have brought away with me everything I possess. Up to now I have been living on my work and the kindness of a good woman, who is a friend of mine, and to whom you can address your answer. She is called Mme Madin, and lives at Versailles. This kind friend will provide me with all I need for the journey, and, once placed, I shall need nothing and shall no longer be an expense to her. My lord, my conduct shall justify the protection you may accord me. Whatever you reply, I shall blame nothing but my hard lot.

Here is Mme Madin's address:

Madame Madin,
at the Pavillon de Bourgogne,
Rue d'Anjou,
Versailles.

Be good enough to use two envelopes, the first for the address, and with a cross on the second.

Oh, how I want to have your answer! I am in continual anxiety.

Your most humble and obedient servant,

SUSAN SIMONIN."

This letter will be found in more extended form at the end of the novel proper, where M. Diderot inserted it, at the time when, the first rough draft having fallen into his hands after twenty-one years of oblivion, he decided to revise and put it into shape.

We needed an address to which answers might be sent; we lit upon a certain Mme Madin, wife of a former infantry officer, who really lived at Versailles. She knew nothing of our rascally behaviour, nor of the letters we subsequently made her write to herself, and to write which we made use of another young person. Mme Madin only knew that she had to receive and transmit to me all letters marked Caen. Chance had it that M. de Croismare, on his return to Paris about eight years after our crime, met Mme Madin in the house of one of our woman friends who had been in the plot. This came as a thunderbolt. M. de Croismare was intending to inform himself thoroughly about the unfortunate girl who had interested him so much and about whom Mme Madin knew absolutely nothing. This was also the moment of our "general confession" and absolution.

Answer of the Marquis de Croismare

“Your letter has reached the very person that you were seeking. You are not mistaken as to my feelings. You can leave at once for Caen, if it suits you, to look after a young lady. Let the lady who is your friend send me word that she is despatching a lady’s-maid of the kind I want, with such a recommendation of your capacities as she pleases, without going into any details. Let her also let me know the name you have chosen, the carriage you will be taking, and, if possible, the day of your departure. If you take the Caen coach, it leaves Paris early on Monday morning, arriving here Friday. It puts up at Paris in the Rue Saint Denis, at the Great Stag. If you find nobody to meet you on your arrival at Caen, go, while you are waiting, to M. Gassion’s, opposite the Place Royale. As the strictest incognito is necessary on both sides, let your friend return this letter, in which you can have complete confidence, though it is not signed. Only keep the seal, which will enable the person to whom you will report yourself at Caen to identify you. Follow exactly and diligently the instructions in this letter, and for the sake of prudence bring neither letters, papers, nor anything else which might cause you to be recognized. They can easily come on at another time. Count confidently on the good intentions of your servant.

… near Caen, February 6th, 1760.”

This letter was addressed to Mme Madin. There was a cross on the other envelope, according to the arrangement made. The seal represented a Cupid, holding a torch in one hand and two hearts in the other, with a motto which was illegible, because the seal had been broken when the letter was opened. It was natural that a young nun, who knew nothing about love, should take this representation for that of her guardian angel.

Answer of the nun to the Marquis de Croismare

“Monsieur,

I have received your letter. I think I have been very ill, very ill. I am very weak. If God takes me to Him I shall pray unceasingly for your salvation. If

I recover I shall do whatever you tell me, my dear sir! You good man! I shall never forget your kindness. My kind friend ought to be coming from Versailles now. She will tell you everything.

I shall be careful to keep your seal. I see that it is the impress of a holy angel. It is you, my guardian angel."

M. Diderot, not having been able to come to the robbers' meeting, this answer was sent without being passed by him. He did not approve of it, and asserted that it would give our treachery away. He was mistaken and wrong, I think, in not liking our answer. However, in order to satisfy him we inserted in the books of our criminal committee the following answer, which was never sent. In any case, the news of her illness was essential in order to postpone the nun's departure for Caen.

FROM OUR RECORDS

That is the letter that was sent, and here follows the one that Sister Susan ought to have written.

"Monsieur,

Thank you for all your kindness. It is unnecessary to think of anything further – everything is over with me. I shall appear in a moment before the God of Pity, and there I shall remember you. They are discussing whether they shall bleed me the third time. They will give what they think the proper orders. Good-bye, my dear sir. I hope my next dwelling-place will be happier than this one. We shall see each other there."

From Mme Madin to the Marquis de Croismare

"I am beside her bed, and she urges me to write to you. She was in the last extremity, and, as I cannot easily leave Versailles, I could not get to help her sooner. You may be sure, my lord, that she has gone through a great deal. She had a fall, which she hid from me. She was suddenly attacked with

burning fever, which could be overcome only by bleeding. I think she is now out of danger. What disturbs her at the moment is the fear that her convalescence must be a long one, and that she may not be able to leave for a month or six weeks. She is already very weak and will get weaker. Try then, my lord, to gain time, and let us work together to save the most unfortunate and interesting creature in the world. I must describe the impression that your letter made on her. She has wept much, and written the address of M. Gassion at the back of a *Saint Susan* in her breviary. Then she wanted to answer you, though so weak. She had just passed through a crisis. I cannot tell what her letter to you may have contained because she hardly knew what she was doing. Excuse this letter, my lord, but I am writing to you in a hurry. I am extremely unhappy about her and do not at all want to leave her, but it is quite impossible for me to remain here several days in succession. Here is the letter that you wrote her. I am despatching another along the lines you suggested. In it I do not dwell on her social accomplishments. They are unsuitable for the life she is going to live, and it seems to me that she must give them up completely if she wishes to remain unrecognized. Still, everything I am saying about her is true. No, my lord, there is no mother who would not be overjoyed at having such a child. My first care, as you might imagine, has been to assure her safety, and that is now done. I shall never bring myself to let her go before her health is completely restored, which cannot be before a month or six weeks, as I had the honour of telling you before. And this is on the assumption that there is no relapse. She is keeping the seal of your letter. It is in her *Hours* and under her pillow. I have not dared tell her that it was not yours. I had broken it on opening your reply and replaced it with my own. In her then dangerous state I could not risk sending her your letter without reading it first. I venture to ask you to send her a line, which will sustain her in her hopes, and I could not answer for her life if these hopes failed her. If you could be

kind enough to give me a few details about the house to which she is going I would make use of them to keep quiet her fears. You may be quite sure about your letters. They will be sent back as regularly as the first one, and you should be reassured by the fact that my own self-interest will prevent my doing anything rash. We will conform in everything, unless you alter your arrangements. Farewell, my lord. The unfortunate darling prays for you whenever the state of her head permits it. I still expect your answer, my lord, as before, at the Pavillon de Bourgogne.

February 16th, 1760."

Letter of recommendation from Mme Madin, as requested by the Marquis de Croismare

"Monsieur,

The person in question is called Susan Simonin. I love her as my own child; but still you can take everything I am going to say literally, as I am not given to exaggeration. She has lost both her father and her mother; she is of good birth and education. She can do all those little things which one learns if one is capable and industrious. She talks not much, but quite well, and writes naturally. If the person for whom you intend her wishes to be read to, she reads magnificently; she is of medium height, and has a very good figure. I have rarely seen a more interesting face. She will perhaps be thought rather young, for I think she has hardly completed her seventeenth year. But what she lacks in the experience born of years she quite makes up for in what is taught by suffering. She is very discreet and has more than usually good judgment. I can answer for the excellence of her character. She is religious, but not the least narrow-minded. She has a very simple nature, a quiet gaiety, and is never out of humour. I have two daughters, and, if her special circumstances did not prevent Mlle Simonin settling in Paris, I

should ask for no other governess for them. I do not hope to find another one so good. I have known her since her childhood, and she has always lived under my eyes. She will leave here well set up. I will make myself responsible for her travelling expenses, and for those of the return journey, if she is sent back. This is the least I can do for her. She has never left Paris and does not know where she is going. She thinks herself lost, and I have had all the trouble in the world to reassure her. One word from you, my lord, as to the person for whom she is designed, the house which she will inhabit, and the duties which she will be expected to perform will have more effect on her than anything I can say. Surely it is not putting too great a strain on your good nature to ask you to do this. Her one fear is that she may not be a success. The poor child does not know of what she is capable.

I have the honour to be, my lord, with all the admiration you deserve,

Your very humble, obedient servant,

MOREAU MADIN.

Paris, February 16th, 1760."

Letter from the Marquis de Croismare to Mme Madin

"Madam,

Two days ago I got your note informing me of Mlle Simonin's illness. Her unhappy fate made me weep; her state of health alarms me. Could I ask you for the consolation of being told about her condition, and of what she intends to do, in a word an answer to the letter which I wrote her? I dare to hope everything from your kindness and from the interest you take in the matter.

Your very humble, obedient servant,

Caen, February 19th, 1760."

The same to the same

“I was in great suspense, Madam, and fortunately your letter has relieved my anxiety about the health of Mlle Simonin and her danger of being discovered. I am writing to her, and you can further reassure her as to the continuance of my interest in her. Her letter had impressed me; and, seeing her embarrassment, I could think of nothing better than to attach her to myself in getting her to look after my daughter, who has unfortunately lost her mother. This, Madam, is the house on which I have decided for her. I am sure of myself, and of my power to mitigate her sufferings without having to be indiscreet, which would perhaps be harder for other people. I shall always be unhappy about her lot and my own inability to do all that I should like, but we have to incline before the laws of necessity. I have a property seven miles from the nearest town, in a pleasant country district, where I live in retirement with my daughter and eldest son, a young man of good instincts and a religious turn of mind, whom I shall not, however, tell about her affairs. As for the servants, they have all been here with me a long time, so that we make up a very quiet and united household. I should add that I regard this proposition only as something to fall back upon. Should she find anything better, I do not intend to hold her by a contract. But she may rest assured that she will always find a sure resource in me. So now she must get well and not worry. I shall wait for her, and meanwhile should much like to have frequent news of her.

I have the honour to be, Madam, your very obedient, humble servant,

Caen, February 21st, 1760.”

From the same to Sister Susan(with a cross on the envelope)

“No one could be more distressed than I am at the condition in which you find yourself. I can become but more and more anxious to procure you some alleviation of the wretched fate which pursues you. Do not worry, get back your strength, and have complete confidence in me. You should think

of nothing except regaining your health and keeping safely out of sight. If I could do more to make you comfortable I would do it; but I am handicapped by your position and can only bow to necessity. The person for whom I intend you is one of those whom I love most, and you will be chiefly responsible to me. Thus, as far as possible, I shall be careful to mitigate the little inconveniences inseparable from the way of life which you are adopting. You will owe me your confidence; I shall in turn have confidence in the way you set about your duties. This assurance ought to comfort you and assure you of my way of thinking and the genuine regard with which I am your very humble, obedient servant.

Caen, February 21st, 1760.

I am writing to Mme Madin, who will be able to tell you more."

From Mme Madin

"Marquis de Croismare.

Monsieur,

It is now certain that our dear invalid will recover. No more fever; no more headache: everything promises the promptest convalescence and the best of health. Her lips are still rather white, but her eyes are getting back their brightness. The colour is beginning to come back into her cheeks; her flesh is beginning to get clear again and will soon get back its firmness. Everything is all right, now that her mind is at peace. Now it is, my lord, that she appreciates your benevolence at its full worth; and nothing could be more touching than the way in which she talks of it. I wish I could describe to you all that passed between me and her when I took her your last letters. She took them with trembling hands and scarcely breathed as she read them; she stopped over each line; and, when she had finished, she said to me, as she threw herself on my neck and wept hot tears: 'So God has not abandoned me, Mme Madin, after all. So He wants me to be happy at last.

Yes, it is God who made me write to this good gentleman. Who else in the world would have taken pity on me? Let us thank God for this first promise, that others may be granted us.' Then she sat on her bed and began to pray. Then after this, as she went over some passages in your letter again she said: 'He is entrusting his daughter to me, Mamma; she will be like him, gentle, benevolent, sympathetic like him.' Then she stopped and said with genuine feeling: 'She has lost her mother. I am sorry that I have not got the necessary experience. I have no knowledge, but I will do my best. I shall be mindful day and night of what I owe her father. Gratitude must make up for a number of things. Shall I be ill long? When shall I be allowed to eat something? I no longer feel my fall in the least.' I send you these small details, my lord, hoping they may please you. She put so much innocence and enthusiasm into her speech and action that I was quite beside myself. I would have given everything for you to have seen and heard her. No, my lord, either I know nothing about life or you will have a unique creature who will be the blessing of your house. What you have had the goodness to tell me about yourself, your daughter, your son, and your situation, falls in exactly with her wishes. She persists in the first proposals she made you. She only asks for food and clothing, and you may take her at her word, if you will. Though not rich, I will take over the rest. I love the child; I have adopted her in my heart, and what little I have been able to do for her in her lifetime will be continued after my death. I cannot hide from you that the words, *something to fall back upon*, and *being free to find a better situation if occasion offers*, have caused her pain, and I was not sorry to observe this sign of delicate feeling. I shall not fail to keep you informed about the progress of her convalescence; but I have a great plan, in which I do not despair of succeeding during her convalescence if you could put me in touch with one of your friends. You must have many here. I should need a sensible, discreet, and tactful man, of not too great a station, who could

himself, or by means of friends, speak to some people of lofty station whom I would name to him; such a person should have access to Court, though without a Court appointment. According to my way of envisaging the matter, he would not be admitted to our confidence, but would serve us without knowing how. Even should my effort be fruitless, it would be so much gained in that we should thus persuade people that she has left the country. If you can put me in touch with someone, please give me his name and tell me where he lives, and then write and tell him that Mme Madin, whom you have known for a long time, will be coming to ask him a favour, and will he kindly help her if the thing is possible. If you cannot suggest anybody we must not bother any more about it, but think the matter over, my lord. For the rest, you may count on the interest that I take in our unfortunate little friend and the prudence which I have acquired from experience. The pleasure your last letter caused her slightly affected her pulse. But it will not be anything.

I have the honour, my lord, to remain, with my respectful compliments,

Your very humble, obedient servant,

MOREAU MADIN.

Paris, March 3rd, 1760."

Mme Madin's idea of approaching one of Susan's generous protector's friends was a suggestion of Satan, by means of which her agents, in their cunning, hoped to prompt their friend in Normandy to approach me and to take me into his confidence over the whole affair. It succeeded perfectly, as you will see from the rest of the correspondence.

From Sister Susan to the Marquis de Croismare

"Monsieur,

Mother Madin has given me the two answers with which you have honoured me, and also shown me the letter which you have written her. I

accept, oh, I accept! It is a hundred times more than I deserve, yes, a hundred times, a thousand times more! I have seen so few people, I am inexperienced, and I know so well all the qualities I ought to possess to be worthy of your confidence in me. My position will form me, and Mother Madin says that that is better than if I went into my position ready formed. But, oh dear! what a hurry I am in to be well, to go and throw myself at the feet of my benefactor, and to serve him by being useful to his daughter in every way I can. I am told that this will take a month at least. A month! What a long time! My dear lord, do not forget me! I am quite stunned with happiness; but they do not want me to write; they prevent my reading; keep me in bed; drown me in camomile; starve me to death; and all for my own good. Heaven be thanked! All the same I obey them greatly against my inclinations.

I am, my lord, with a grateful heart,
Your very humble, respectful servant,
SUSAN SIMONIN.
Paris, March 3rd, 1760."

From the Marquis de Croismare to Mme Madin

"A slight indisposition from which I have been suffering for several days has prevented me, Madam, from answering you sooner, in order to express to you the pleasure which I experienced on hearing that Mlle Simonin was convalescent. I dare hope you will soon be good enough to inform me of her being completely cured, as I fervently desire. But I am deeply distressed that I cannot contribute to the execution of the plan which you contemplate on her behalf. As I do not know it, I can only suppose it excellent because of the prudence which you have always manifested and the interest you take in the subject. I lived a very retired life in Paris, and knew only a small number of persons, as retiring as myself, and acquaintances of the kind you

need are not easy to come by. Pray continue to give me news of Mlle Simonin, whose interests are always dear to me.

I have the honour to be, Madam,

Your very humble, obedient servant.

March 31st, 1760."

From Mme Madin to the Marquis de Croismare

"Monsieur,

Perhaps I was wrong in not explaining my plan, but I was in such a hurry to put it into practice. This, then, is what I had thought of. First you must know that the Cardinal de T —— protected her family. They lost everything by his death, especially my dear Susan, who had been presented to him as a small child. The old Cardinal was fond of pretty children: the charms of this one had struck him, and he had promised to look after her. But when he passed away, they disposed of her in the way that you know of, and her protectors thought they had done enough for the youngest by marrying off her elder sisters. So it occurred to me that if anyone could get to Mme la Marquise de T —— – who is said to be, if not compassionate, at least very energetic (but what does it matter by *whom* good is done?), and who put herself to endless trouble over my child's law-suit – and could describe to her the sad plight of a young person exposed to all the dangers of poverty, in a remote and alien land, we might by this means extract a small pension from the two brothers-in-law, who have pocketed the whole inheritance and never dream of offering us assistance. Really, sir, it would be well worth our both thinking about this. You see, with this small allowance, together with what I have left her, and what she would receive from your kindness, she would be quite comfortable for the present, not so badly off in the future, and I should see her go off with less regret. But I know neither the Marquise de T —— nor the secretary of the late Cardinal, who is said to be a man of

letters, nor anyone who knows them. And it was the child who proposed I should write to you. For the rest I cannot say that her convalescence goes quite as I should like. Her loins were damaged internally, as I think I told you. The pain from the fall, which had vanished, is making itself felt again. It comes and goes and is accompanied by a slight internal shivering, but the pulse shows no fever. The doctor tosses his head, and I do not quite like his expression. She is going to Mass next Sunday. She wishes it, and I have just sent her a large hood, which will cover her to the tip of her nose, and under protection of which she will, I think, be able to spend half an hour in the dark little church near us without any danger. She sighs for the moment of her departure, and I am sure she will pray God for nothing more fervently than that He should hasten her recovery. If she felt able to start between Easter and the following Sunday I should not fail to let you know. For the rest, my lord, her absence would not prevent my acting, if I could discover among my acquaintances anyone who could do something with Mme de T —— and Dr. A —— , who has a lot of influence over her.

I am, my lord, with infinite gratitude on her behalf and my own,

Your very humble, obedient servant,

MOREAU MADIN.

Versailles, March 23rd, 1760.

P.S. I have forbidden her to write, lest she importune you: this consideration alone restrains her."

The Marquis de Croismare to Mme Madin

"Madam,

Your plan for Mlle Simonin appears excellent and pleases me all the more as I should be delighted to know her amid her misfortunes assured of a tolerable position. I do not despair of finding some friend who may put pressure on Mme de T —— or Dr. A —— or the secretary of the late

Cardinal, but all this needs time and care, as much to prevent the secret coming out as to assure myself about the discretion of the people to whom I think I might address myself. I shall not forget this, and meanwhile, if Mlle Simonin persists in her present feelings and her health has sufficiently recovered, nothing need prevent her starting. She will find that my feelings are just the same as is my zeal to mitigate if possible the bitterness of her lot. The state of my affairs and the bad times compel me to live very quietly in the country with my children for reasons of economy: we live very simply. So Mlle Simonin need not put herself to any expense in buying smart clothes. Plain things are enough here. She will find me on my property, and in a simple united household, where I hope she will be able to find pleasure and enjoyment despite the tiresome precautions I shall be compelled to adopt with her. Be good enough to inform me of the day she leaves, and in case she has lost the address I sent her, it is:

At M. Gassion's, opposite the Place Royale, Caen. However, if I know the day of her arrival in time she will find someone there to bring her on here at once.

I have the honour to be, Madam,

Your very humble, obedient servant.

March 31st, 1760."

Mme Madin to the Marquis de Croismare

"Does she persist in her feelings, my lord? How can you doubt it?

What better fate can she have than to go and pass quiet, happy days with a man of position and in a decent family? And where would she lay her head if the retreat you have had the generosity to offer her were lacking? It is she, my lord, who speaks so. I have only to repeat to you what she says. She insisted on going to Mass on Easter Sunday, against my advice, and it did her no good. She came back feverish, and since that unlucky day she

has not been well. My lord, I shall certainly not send her off till she is in good health. At present she suffers from inflammation of the loins in the place where she hurt herself when she fell. I have just looked, but can see nothing at all. But my doctor told me yesterday, as we came downstairs together, that he was afraid of vibration setting in and that we must wait and see how it develops. Meanwhile she has a good appetite, sleeps well, and does not lose weight. I only sometimes notice that her cheeks are redder and her eyes brighter than is natural with her. Then her impatience makes me desperate. She gets up and tries to walk, but the moment she leans on her bad side she screams enough to make your heart break. But I hope, despite everything, and have made use of the time to arrange her little trousseau.

There is a dress of English calamanco, which she can wear in one thickness during the warm weather and which she can double for the winter, and another of blue cotton, which she is wearing at present. Several white petticoats, of which two belong to me, of dimity, trimmed with muslin.

Two similar bodices, which I had had made for my youngest daughter and turned out to suit her perfectly. That will make up her summer dress.

Fifteen trimmed shifts, some of cambric, others of muslin. Halfway through June I will send her the materials for making six others, with a piece of linen whitened for me at Senlis.

Some corsets, aprons, neckerchiefs.

Two dozen pocket handkerchiefs.

Some night-caps.

Six scalloped *dormeuses*, with eight pairs of cuffs with one tuck and three with two.

Six pairs of fine cotton stockings.

This is all I have been able to do for her. I bought her the trousseau the day after the Easter feasts, and I cannot describe to you with what real feeling she accepted it. She looked at one thing, tried another, took me by

my hands and kissed them. But she could never restrain her tears when she saw my daughter's bodices. 'Dear me! I said to her, 'what are you crying about? Have you not always been a daughter to me too?'

'*It is true*,' she answered. Then she added: 'I think I should hate to die now when I hope to be happy. Mamma, will the inflammation in my side never disappear? Suppose they put something there?'

I am delighted, my lord, that you do not disapprove of my plan and see how to make it come to something. I owe everything to your foresight. But I think I ought to warn you that the Marquise de T —— is leaving for the country, that Dr. A —— is inaccessible and crabbed, and that the secretary, proud of having been made an Academician after twenty years' canvassing, is returning to Brittany in three or four months from now, and then we shall be quite forgotten. Things lose their interest so quickly here. Even now people hardly refer to us; in a short time they will not do so at all.

Never fear that she will lose the address you sent her. She never opens her *Book of Hours* to pray without looking at it: she might sooner forget her own name of Simonin than that of M. Gassion. I asked her if she did not want to write to you, but she answered that she had begun you a long letter, which was to contain everything she would have to tell you, if God saw good to cure her and let her see you; but that she had a presentiment that this would never happen.

'It is going on too long, Mamma,' she added; 'I shall never profit from your kindness or his. Either his lordship will change his feelings or I shall not get well.'

'How absurd,' I said; 'you may be sure that if you encourage these gloomy thoughts, what you fear will happen.'

She said: '*Let God's will be done.*' I asked her to show me what she had written to you. I was horrified. It is a whole volume, a large volume. 'You are killing yourself with all that,' I said angrily.

‘What would you have me do?’ she answered. ‘When I am not miserable I am bored.’

‘And when have you found time to scribble all that down?’

‘A little at one time, a little at another. Whether I live or die, I want all my sufferings to be known.’

I forbade her to continue, and her doctor did the same. But pray, my lord, add your authority to my prayers. She regards you as her dear master and will certainly obey you. But as I imagine she finds the hours long, and that she ought to have something to occupy her, were it only to prevent her going on writing, dreaming, and worrying herself, I had her brought an embroidery frame and I have suggested she should begin a waistcoat for you. She was delighted with the idea and has set to work at once. Pray Heaven she be not here long enough to finish it. One word, pray, to prevent her writing and working too much. I had meant to return to Versailles this evening; but I am not happy about her. This vibration beginning worries me, and I want to be with her when the doctor calls again tomorrow. Unfortunately I have some faith in the presentiments of invalids; they know their real condition. When I lost M. Madin, all the doctors assured me he would get over it. But he said himself that he would not; and the poor man spoke only too truly. So I shall stay here and have the honour of writing to you. If I have to lose her I do not think I shall ever get over it. You yourself, my lord, will then be fortunate in not having seen her. Now is the moment when those wretches who determined her to escape feel all they have lost. But it is too late.

I have the honour to be, my lord, with every feeling of respect and gratitude on her behalf and my own,

Your very humble, obedient servant,

MOREAU MADIN.

Paris, April 13th, 1760.”

The Marquis de Croismare to Mme Madin

“I share, Madam, with genuine feeling your alarm about Mlle Simonin’s illness. Her unfortunate state had always infinitely moved me. But the details into which you were good enough to enter as to her capacities and instincts prejudice me so much in her favour that it would be impossible for me not to take the liveliest interest in her. Thus far from altering in my feelings for her, pray repeat to her all I displayed in my letter to you, and which will undergo no change. I thought it wise not to write to her, so that she would have no occasion to worry herself with answers. There can be no doubt that all work is bad for her in her delicate condition, and, had I power over her, I would use it to check her. I can do no better than ask you to let her know my feelings in this matter. Certainly I should be delighted to have a letter from her personally, but I could not approve of an act of pure politeness on her part, which might help to delay her cure. The interest you take in her makes it unnecessary that I should ask you again to restrain her on this point. You may always be sure of my sincere affection for her and the particular and real regard with which I have the honour to be, Madam, your very humble servant.

April 25th, 1760.

P.S. I shall write at once to one of my friends whom you can approach about Mme de T —— . He is called M. G —— , secretary to the Duke of Orléans. He lives in the rue Neuve de Luxemburg, near the rue Saint-Honoré: I shall warn him that you are going to call and make it clear that I am under a great obligation to you and ask for nothing better than an occasion to show it. He does not usually dine at home.”

From Mme Madin to the Marquis de Croismare

“Monsieur,

How much I have gone through since I had the honour of writing to you. I have never liked to make you share my sufferings, and I hope you will be grateful to me for not having put your feeling nature to such a severe trial. You know how dear she was to me. Conceive then, my lord, that for a whole fortnight I have seen her steadily slipping towards her end, in the acutest suffering. At last, I think, God has taken pity on herself and me. The unhappy girl is still alive, but it cannot, I think, be for long. Her strength is exhausted, she hardly speaks, and her eyes can barely open. Her patience is all she has left. Without that, what will become of us? My hopes for her recovery suddenly disappeared. An abscess had formed in her side, and had made steady progress ever since her fall. She did not wish it to be opened in time, and when she at last made up her mind to it, it was too late. She feels her last moment coming, and has sent me away, and I admit I am in no state to bear the sight. She received the Sacraments of the Church yesterday between ten and eleven in the evening. She asked for them herself. After this sad ceremony I remained alone by her bed. She heard me sigh, and felt for my hand, which I gave her. She took it and put it to her lips; then drawing me to her, said so low that I hardly heard her:

'Mamma, one favour more …'

'What, child?'

'Bless me and go away.'

She added: 'His lordship … do not fail to thank him.'

These must have been her last words. I gave my orders and went to a friend's, where I remained in immediate expectation. It is an hour past midnight. Perhaps at this moment we have a friend in Heaven.

I am with respect, my lord, your very humble and obedient servant,

MOREAU MADIN."

(This letter was written on May 7th, but is undated.)

Mme Madin to the Marquis de Croismare

"The dear child is no more: her sufferings are over; ours have perhaps still a long time to last. She passed from this world to that which awaits us all last Wednesday, between three and four in the morning. As her life was innocent, so her last hours were calm, despite all that had been done to disturb them. Allow me to thank you for the tender interest you took in her. It is the only duty which remains for me to do her. Here are all the letters with which you honoured us. I had kept some and have found the others among the papers which she handed me a few days before her death. They contained, she informed me, the story of her life with her parents, in the three religious Houses where she lived, and what happened to her after she left. I do not think I can read them now. I can see nothing which belonged to her, not even those things which in my love I had intended for her, without deep grief.

I am very glad, my lord, to have been useful to you, and I shall be flattered if you remember me.

I am, sir, with all those feelings of respect and gratitude which are due to men of heart and charity,

Your very humble, obedient servant,

MOREAU MADIN.

May 10th, 1760."

The Marquis de Croismare to Mme Madin

"I know, Madam, what it means to a tender-hearted benevolent woman to lose the object to which she is attached, as well as the pleasant opportunity of dispensing the favours so worthily earned both by misfortune and the amiable qualities which were those of the dear child, who is to-day the subject of your grief. I share them as heartily as possible. You knew her –

which makes your separation the harder to bear. Though I had not had this advantage, her misfortunes had stirred me deeply and I was enjoying in advance the pleasure of being able to contribute to the peace of her days. If God has willed it otherwise and seen good to deprive me of the satisfaction, which I so greatly desired, I must thank Him for it; but I cannot remain insensible to it. You at any rate have the satisfaction of having acted towards her with the noblest sentiments and the most generous conduct. I admired all you did, and my ambition would have been to imitate you. There remains to me now but the ardent desire to have the honour of knowing you and to express to you in person how greatly I have been delighted by the grandeur of your soul and with what respectful consideration I have the honour to be, Madam, your very humble, obedient servant.

May 18th, 1760.

P.S. Everything relating to the memory of our unhappy friend has become very dear to me. Would it be asking you too much to communicate to me those little accounts which she drew up of her different sufferings? I ask this favour all the more confidently because you told me I had some rights in them. I will be sure to send them back with all your letters at the earliest opportunity, if you think fit. Please send them by the Caen coach, which puts up at the Great Stag, Rue Saint Denis, Paris. It starts every Monday."

So ends the story of the unfortunate Sister Suzanne Saulier (called Simonin in his story and in this correspondence). It is very unfortunate that the memoirs of her life have not been put into order. They would have made very interesting reading. After all the Marquis de Croismare ought to be grateful to his perfidious friends for having offered him an opportunity to succour misfortune with a nobility, disinterestedness and simplicity really

worthy of him. His rôle in this correspondence is not the least moving part of the novel.

We shall be blamed perhaps for having inhumanly hastened the end of Sister Susan, but this was made necessary by information received from the château of Lasson, that a room was being made ready to receive Mlle de Croismare, whom her father was going to remove from the convent where she had been since her mother's death. Our informant added that a lady's-maid was expected from Paris, who would also act as governess to the young person, and that M. de Croismare was incidentally trying to find a place for the nursery-maid who had been with his daughter up to now. This information allowed us no choice. Neither the youth, beauty or innocence of Sister Susan, nor her gentle, affectionate and tender nature, which might have touched the least compassionate heart, could save her from her inevitable death. But as we had come to share all the feelings of Mme Madin for this interesting creature, we were almost as much afflicted at her death as was her excellent protector.

If there are certain minor discrepancies between this account and the "Memoirs", it is because most of the letters are later in date than the novel itself; and it will be agreed that if ever there was a useful Preface it is the one you have just read and that it is perhaps the only one the reading of which has had to be postponed to the end of the work.

A QUESTION ADDRESSED TO MEN OF LETTERS

M. Diderot, having spent his mornings composing very eloquent, very cogent, very pathetic and romantic letters, employed later hours in spoiling them – suppressing, on the advice of his wife and his associates in crime, everything that was overdone or exaggerated in them and contrary to perfect simplicity and verisimilitude: with the result that if one had picked up the earlier ones in the street, one would have said: "That is beautiful,

most beautiful …", and if one had picked up the later ones, one would have said: "That is so true …" Which are the good ones? Those which would have inspired admiration? Or those which were certain to create illusion?

The Philosophical Works



In 1732 Diderot received the degree of Master of Arts from the University of Paris.

Philosophical Thoughts (1746)

Translated by Margaret Jourdain, 1916

Original French Title: 'Pensées philosophiques'

In 1746, Diderot published his first work, *Pensées philosophiques,* which argues for a reconciliation of reason with feeling, so as to establish harmony. According to Diderot, without feeling there is a detrimental effect on virtue, and no possibility of creating sublime work. Since feeling without discipline can be destructive, he posits that reason is necessary to control feeling. At the time Diderot wrote this essay he was a deist — holding the belief in the existence of God solely based on rational thought, without any reliance on revealed religions or religious authority. His *Pensées philosophiques*, therefore, can be viewed as a defense of deism, with daring examples of criticism of Christianity and even hints of atheistic beliefs.

Soon after publication, the Parlement of Paris condemned the treatise and ordered it to be burned in public. Of course, this enhanced its popularity. Since the essay was well-written and Diderot continued to conceal his identity as the author, it was thought by both Diderot's friends and enemies that the work was of an established author like Voltaire.

PENSÉES

PHILOSOPHIQUES.

Piſcis hic non eſt omnium.

A LA HAYE;
Aux dépens de la Compagnie.

M. DCC. XLVI.

The first edition's title page

PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHTS



QUIT LEGET HÆC. — PERS. Sat. 1. 2.

I WRITE of God; I count on a very few readers; and do not hope to find many in agreement with me. If these thoughts please nobody, they are certainly bad, but I should count them sorry stuff if they were to everybody's taste.

I

People are for ever declaiming against the passions; they attribute to them all the pains that man endures, and forget that they are also the source of all his pleasures. It is an ingredient in man's constitution which cannot sufficiently be blessed and banned. It is considered as an affront to reason if one ventures to say a word in favour of its rivals; yet it is passions alone, and strong passions, that can elevate the soul to great things. Without them, there is no sublime, either in morality or in achievement; the fine arts return to puerility, and virtue becomes a pettifogging thing.

II

Sober passions make men commonplace. If I hang back before the enemy, when my country's safety is at stake, I am but a poor citizen. My friendship is but self-regarding if my friend's peril leaves me considering my own danger. If life is dearer to me than my mistress, I am a poor lover.

III

Deadened passions degrade men of extraordinary quality. Constraint annihilates the grandeur and energy of nature. Look at that tree; it is to the luxury of its branches that you owe the coolness and breadth' of its shade, which you may enjoy until winter despoils it of its leafy honours. There is no more excellence in poetry, in painting, and in music when superstition has wrought upon the human temperament the effect of old age.

IV

It would be fortunate, people will say to me, for a man to have strong passions? Certainly, if they are all in harmony. Establish a just harmony among them, and you need fear no convulsions and disorders. If hope be balanced by fear, the point of honour by love of life, the taste for pleasure by consideration for health, there will be no libertines, nor rufflers, nor poltroons.

V

It is the very height of madness to propose the ruin of the passions. A fine design, truly, in your devotee, to torment himself like a convict in order to desire nothing, love nothing, and feel nothing.

He would end by becoming a monster, if he were to succeed.

VI

Can what is the object of my respect in one man be the object of my scorn in another? Certainly not. Truth, independently of my caprices, should be the rule of my judgments, and I shall not call that quality a crime in one man which I admire as a virtue in another. Am I to think that the practice of self-improvement is to be restricted to some few, when nature and religion inculcate it on all alike? Whence comes this monopoly? If Pachomius did

well in separating himself from the human race and burying himself in a wilderness, I may follow his example, and in imitating him I shall be equally virtuous; and I see no reason, why a hundred others may not have the same right. Yet it would be a strange sight to see an entire province, dismayed at the dangers of society, dispersed in forests, the inhabitants living like wild beasts to sanctify themselves, and a thousand pillars rising above the ruins of all social affections; a new race of Stylites stripping themselves from religious motives of all natural feelings, ceasing to be men and becoming statues in order to be true Christians.

VII

What voices, what cries, what groans! Who has shut up in dungeons all these piteous wretches? What crimes have all these creatures committed?

Some beat their breasts with stones, others lacerate their body with iron nails, all express in their eyes regret, pain, and death. Who condemns them to such torments? *The God whom they have offended.* Who then is this God? *A God full of goodness*. But would a God full of goodness take pleasure in bathing himself in tears? Are not these fears an insult to his kindness? If criminals had to appease the fury of a tyrant, what more could they do?

VIII

These are people of whom we ought not to say that they fear God, but that they are mortally afraid of him.

IX

Judging from the picture they paint of the Supreme Being, from his tendency to wrath, from the rigour of his vengeance, from certain

comparisons of the ratio between those he abandons to perish and those to whom he deigns to stretch out a hand, the most upright soul would be tempted to wish that such a being did not exist. We would be happy enough in this world, if we were assured we had nothing to fear in another. The thought that a God did not exist has never terrified humanity, but the idea that a God such as is represented exists.

X

God must be imagined as neither too kind nor too cruel. Justice is the mean between clemency and cruelty, just as finite penalties are the mean between impunity and eternal punishment

XI

I am aware that the sombre ideas of superstition are more generally approved of than accepted; that there are pietists who do not think it necessary to hate themselves in order to love God, or to live as desperate wretches, in order to be religious; their devotion is a smiling one, their wisdom very human; but whence comes this difference in sentiment between people who prostrate themselves before the same altars? Can piety thus be subject to the law of temperament? Alas! it must be so. Its influence is only too apparent in the same devotee: he sees, in accordance with its variations, a jealous or a merciful God, and hell or heaven opening before him; he trembles with fear or burns with love; it is a fever with its hot and cold fits.

XII

Yes, I maintain that superstition is more of an insult to God than atheism. “I would rather,” said Plutarch, “that people thought that a Plutarch never

existed, than that they thought of Plutarch as unjust, choleric, inconstant, jealous and revengeful, and such as he would be sorry to be."

XIII

Only the deist can oppose the atheist. The superstitious man is not so strong an opponent.

His God is only a creature of the imagination. Besides difficulties of a material nature, he is exposed to those which result from the falsity of his notions. A C — and a S — would have been a thousand times more embarrassing to a Vanini than all the Nicoles and Pascals in the world.

XIV

Pascal was an upright man, but he was timid and inclined to credulity. An elegant writer and a profound reasoner, he would doubtless have enlightened the world, if Providence had not abandoned him to people who sacrificed his talents to their own antipathies. How much it is to be regretted that he did not leave to the theologians of his day the task of settling their own disputes; that he did not give himself up to the search for truth without reserve and without fear of offending God, by using all the intellect God had given him! How regrettable that he took for his masters men who were not worthy to be his disciples! One could say of him, as La Mothe said of La Fontaine, that he was foolish enough to think Arnauld, de Sacy, and Nicole better men than himself.

XV

"I tell you that there is no God; that Creation is a fiction; that the eternity of the universe is no more of a difficulty than the eternity of spirit; that because I do not see how motion could have caused this universe (though it

keeps it going), it is ridiculous to solve the difficulty by supposing the existence of a being of whom I can have no real conception; that if the wonders of the physical universe show some intelligence, the confusions in the moral order are the negations of a Providence. I tell you if everything is the work of a God, everything should be the best possible: for if everything is not the best possible, it is impotence or malevolence on the part of God. Therefore it is fortunate that I am not better informed as to his existence. If it were proved satisfactorily (and it is by no means proved) that all evil is the source of good, that it was for the best that Britannicus, the best of princes, perished, and that Nero, the worst of men, should reign, how is it possible to prove that it was impossible to attain the same ends without using such means? To allow vice in order to throw virtue into relief is a poor advantage in comparison with its real disadvantage."

That, says the atheist, is my case; what have you to say to it?— "*That I am a miserable wretch, and that if I had nothing to fear from God, I should not be disputing his existence*." Let us leave such an answer to orators; it may be untrue; politeness forbids it and it has no savour of charity about it. Because a man is mistaken in his denial of God, should we insult him? People only take refuge in invective when they run short of proofs. Of two engaged in argument, it is a hundred to one that the man in the wrong will become angry. "You thunder instead of answering," says Menippus to Jupiter; "are you then in the wrong?"

XVI

One day somebody asked a man if real atheists existed. Do you think, he responded, that real Christians exist?

XVII

None of the vain speculations of metaphysics have the cogency of an argument *ad hominem.* In order to convince, it is sometimes only necessary to rouse the physical or moral instinct. The Pyrrhonist was convinced by a stick that he was wrong in doubting his own existence. Cartouche, pistol in hand, might have taught Hobbes a similar lesson: "Your money or your life; we are alone, I am the stronger, and between us there is no question of justice."

XVIII

It is not from the metaphysician that atheism has received its most vital attack. The sublime meditations of Malebranche and Descartes were less calculated to shake materialism than a single observation of Malpighi's. If this dangerous hypothesis is tottering at the present day, it is to experimental physics that the result is due. It is only in the works of Newton, of Muschenbroek, of Hartzoeker, and of Nieawentit, that satisfactory proofs have been found of the existence of a reign of sovereign intelligence. Thanks to the works of these great men, the world is no longer a God; it is a machine with its wheels, its cords, its pulleys, its springs, and its weights.

XIX

The subtilties of ontology have at best made sceptics, and it was reserved for the knowledge of nature to make true deists. The discovery of germs alone has destroyed one of the most powerful arguments of atheism. Whether motion be essential or accidental to matter, I am now convinced that its effects are limited to developments; all experiments agree in proving to me that putrefaction alone never produced any organism. I can allow that the mechanism of the vilest insect is not less marvellous than that of man; and I am not afraid of the inference that as an intestinal agitation of

molecules is able to produce the one, it is probable that it has produced the other. If an atheist had maintained, two hundred years ago, that some day perhaps people would see men spring full-formed from the bowels of the earth just as we see a mass of insects swarm in putrefying flesh, I would like to know what a metaphysician would have had to say to him?

XX

It was in vain that I made use of scholastic subtilties against the atheist; he found among his feeble reasons one argument of some validity. “A multitude of useless verities are proved to me without any doubt,” he said, “and the existence of God, the reality of moral good and moral evil, and the immortality of the soul are still problems for me. What! Is it less important for me to be informed on these subjects than to be sure that the three angles of a triangle are together equal to two right angles?” While like a skilful orator he made me taste the full bitterness of this reflection, I joined battle with him again with a question which must have appeared singular to a man flushed with his first success. “Are you a thinking being?” I asked. “Can you doubt it?” he answered with a pleased air. “Why not? What have I seen to prove it? Sounds and movements? But the philosopher sees the same in an animal to whom he denies the faculty of thought; why should I allow you what Descartes refuses the ant? Externally, your actions are designed to give me that impression; I should be tempted to maintain that you do think, but reason suspends my judgment Between external actions and thought my reason tells me there is no essential connection; it is possible that your antagonist thinks no more than his watch; must one take for a thinking being the first animal taught to speak? Who has informed you that all men are not? so many well-trained parrots?”

“That is very ingenious,” he returned, “but it is not by motion or sounds but by the continuity of ideas, the connection between propositions, and the

links of the argument that one must judge if a creature thinks. If there was a parrot which could answer every question, I should say at once that it was a thinking being. But what has this to do with the existence of a God? If you were to prove to me that the most intelligent man were perhaps but an automaton, should I be the more disposed to recognise an intelligent Being in nature?"

"That is my affair," said I; "but admit that it would be madness not to credit your brother men with the faculty of thought?"

"Of course, but what follows?"

"It follows that if the universe — but why drag in the universe? — if a butterfly's wing shows me proofs of an intelligence a thousand times stronger than the proof you have that your fellow-man thinks, it would be a thousand times more foolish to deny that God exists than to deny that your fellow-man thinks. I appeal to your knowledge, to your conscience! Have you ever observed in any man more intelligence, order, wisdom, and reasonableness than in the mechanism of an insect? Is not the Deity as clearly apparent in the eye of a flesh-worm as in the works of the great Newton? What, does the formation of the world afford less proof of intelligence than its explanation? What a position!"— "But," you reply, "I admit the faculty of thought in another the more readily as I myself think." That is an analogy I admit I cannot use, but against this must be set the superiority of my proofs to yours. Is not the intelligence of a first cause more conclusively proved in nature by his works than the faculty of reasoning in a philosopher by *his* writings? Remember, I only adduced a butterfly's wing, a flesh-worm's eye, when I could crush you with the weight of the entire universe. I am greatly deceived if this proof is not well worth the best that has ever issued from the schools. It is by this argument, and others equally simple, that I am convinced of the existence of a God,

and not by those tissues of dry and metaphysical ideas which are better calculated to give to truth an air of falsity than to unveil it

XXI

I open the pages of a celebrated professor and I read: “Atheists, I concede to you that movement is essential to matter; what conclusion do you draw from that? That the world is the result of a fortuitous concourse of atoms? You might as well tell me that Homer’s *Iliad or* Voltaire’s *Henriade* is the result of a fortuitous concourse of written characters.” I should be very sorry to use that argument to an atheist; he would make quick work of the comparison. According to laws of the analysis of chances (he would say) I ought not to be surprised that a thing happens, when it is possible and the difficulty of the result is compensated by the number of throws. There is a certain number of throws in which I would back myself to bring 100,000 sixes at once with 100,000 dice. Whatever the definite number of letters with which I am invited fortuitously to create the *Iliad,* there is a certain definite number of throws which would make the venture advantageous to me; indeed, my advantage would be infinite if the number of throws permitted me were infinite. You grant me that matter exists from all eternity and that movement is essential to it. In return for this concession, I will suppose, as you do, that the world has no limits, that the multitude of atoms is infinite, and that this order which causes you astonishment nowhere contradicts itself. Well, from these mutual admissions there follows nothing else unless it be that the possibility of fortuitously creating the universe is very small but that the quantity of throws is infinite; that is to say, that the difficulty of the result is more than sufficiently compensated by the multitude of throws. Therefore, if anything ought to be repugnant to reason, it is the supposition that — matter being in motion from all eternity, and there being perhaps in the infinite number of possible combinations an

infinite number of admirable arrangements, — none of these admirable arrangements would have ensued, out of the infinite multitude of those which matter took on successively. Therefore the mind ought to be more astonished at the hypothetical duration of chaos than at the actual birth of the universe.

XXII

I divide atheists into three classes. There are some who tell you openly there is no God, and are convinced of this; these are genuine atheists: there is a fairly large number of people who do not know what to think and would be glad to decide the question by tossing up; these are sceptical atheists: and a still larger number who wish there were no God, and who pretend to be convinced of his nonexistence and live in harmony with this conviction; these are the braggadocios of the party. I detest braggarts; they are dishonest: I pity genuine atheists; all consolation is dead to them: and I pray God for the sceptics; they lack knowledge.

XXIII

The deist maintains the existence of God, the immortality of the soul and its consequences; the sceptic has not decided on these points; the atheist denies them. The sceptic, therefore, has one more motive for practising virtue than the atheist, and less than the deist. If it were not for fear of the laws, the natural tendency of a man's character, and the knowledge of the actual benefits of virtue, the probity of the atheist would be lacking in foundation, and that of the sceptic would be built upon a "perhaps."

XXIV

Scepticism does not suit everybody. It supposes a profound and careful examination. He who doubts because he is not acquainted with the grounds of credibility is no' better than an ignoramus. The true sceptic has counted and weighed his reasons. But it is no easy matter to weigh arguments. Which of us knows their value with any exactness? Out of a hundred proofs of the same truth, each one will have its partisans. Every mind has its own telescope. An objection which is invisible to you is a colossus to my eyes, and you find an argument trivial that to me is crushing in its efficacy. If we dispute about their intrinsic value, how shall we agree upon their relative? Tell me how many moral proofs are needed to balance a metaphysical conclusion? Are my spectacles in fault, or yours? If, then, it is so difficult to weigh reasons, and if there are no questions which have not two sides, and nearly always in equal measure, how come we to cut knots with such rapidity? How do we come by this convinced and dogmatic air? Have we not a hundred times experienced how revolting is dogmatic presumption? "I have been brought to detest probabilities," says the author of the *Essays,* "when they are foisted on me as infallible; I love words which soften and moderate the temerity of our propositions, *peradventure*, *in no wise*, *some people say*, *me thinks,* and the like; and if I had to teach children I should so train them to answer in this hesitating and undecided manner: '*What does that mean? I do not understand; maybe; is it true?*' that they would have the appearance of apprentices at sixty years of age, rather than of doctors at ten, as at present."

XXV

What is God? A question we ask children, and that philosophers have much trouble in answering.

We know the age when a child ought to learn to read, to sing, to dance, to begin Latin or geometry. It is only in religion that we take no account of

his capacity. He hardly hears what you say before he is asked, “What is God?” It is at the same moment, and from the same lips, that he learns of the existence of ghosts, goblins, were-wolves — and a God! He is taught one of the most important truths in a manner adapted to bring it into disrepute one day before the bar of reason. Would it be at all surprising if, at twenty years of age, finding the existence of God confounded in his mind with a host of idle prejudices, he were to treat it as our judges treat an honest fellow who has fallen into bad company by some accident?

XXVI

People begin to speak to us of God too soon, and another mistake is that his presence is not sufficiently insisted upon. Men have banished God from their company and have hidden him in a sanctuary; the walls of a temple shut him in, he has no existence beyond. Fools that you are, break down these limitations that hamper your ideas; *set God free*; see him everywhere, as he is everywhere, or say that he is non-existent. If I had a child to bring up, I would make his God his companion in such a real sense that he would perhaps find it less difficult to become an atheist, than to escape his presence. Instead of confronting him with a fellow-man (whom maybe he knows to be worse than himself) I would say outright: “God hears you and you are lying.” Young people are influenced by their senses. I would multiply about him symbols indicating the divine presence. If there were a gathering at my house, I would leave a place for God, and I would accustom him to say: “We were four — God, my friend, my tutor, and myself.”

XXVII

Ignorance and incuriosity are two soft pillows, but to find them so we must have a head as well contrived as Montaigne’s.

XXVIII

Vigorous minds and ardent imaginations do not take kindly to the indolence of scepticism. They would rather risk a choice than make none; be deceived than live in doubt. Whether they do not trust their arms, or whether they fear deep waters, we see them always clinging to branches they know to be fragile. They would rather be caught on these branches than abandon themselves to the torrent. They are sure of everything, though they have investigated nothing carefully; they question nothing because they have neither the patience nor the courage. They make, their way by broken lights, and if by chance they come across the truth, it is not by searching, but suddenly and, as it were, by revelation. They are among the dogmatic group what the illuminati are among the pietists. I have seen individuals of this restless type, who could not conceive how tranquillity of mind could be allied with scepticism. “How can one live happily without knowing what one is, whence one comes, whither one goes, why we are here?”

“I make a point of my ignorance on all these questions, and am not distressed,” replies the sceptic coolly; “it is not my fault if my reason is mute when questioned on my state. All my life I shall live in ignorance of what it is impossible for me to know, and be none the worse for it. Why should I regret knowledge which I could not attain, and which is doubtless unnecessary to me, since I have it not? I would as soon make myself wretched, says one of the greatest geniuses of our age, because I am not equipped with four eyes, four feet, and two wings.”

XXIX

A search for truth should be required of one, but not its attainment. May not a sophism affect me as deeply as a solid proof? I am obliged to admit the falsehood that I take to be the truth, and to reject the truth that I take for a

falsehood; but how am I to blame, if I am deceived from no fault of mine? We are not rewarded in the next world for using our intelligence in this; ought we to be punished for a lack of it? To damn a man for foolish reasoning is to forget that he is a fool, and to treat him as a criminal.

XXX

What is a sceptic? A philosopher who has questioned all he believes, and who believes what a legitimate use of his reason and his senses has proved to him to be true. Do you want a more precise definition? Make a Pyrrhonist sincere, and you have the sceptic.

XXXI

What has never been put in question has not been demonstrated. What people have not examined without prepossession has never been examined thoroughly. Scepticism is thus the first step towards truth. It must be applied generally, for it is the touchstone, If to ascertain the existence of God the philosopher begins by questioning it, is there any proposition which should not be so tested?

XXXII

Incredulity is sometimes the vice of a fool, and credulity the defect of a man of intelligence. The latter sees far into the immense ocean of possibilities, the former scarcely sees anything possible but the actual. Perhaps this is what produces the timidity of the one, the temerity of the other.

XXXIII

It is as hazardous to believe too much as too little. The danger of being a polytheist is neither greater nor less than the danger of being an atheist; now

scepticism is the only defence, in any period and in any place, against these two opposite extremes.

XXXIV

A half-hearted scepticism is the mark of a feeble understanding which reveals a pusillanimous reasoner who permits himself to be alarmed by consequences, a superstitious creature who thinks to honour God by imposing fetters on his reason, a species of unbeliever who is afraid of unmasking himself to himself. For if truth has nothing to lose by examination, as is the demi-sceptic's conviction, what does he think in the bottom of his heart of those privileged notions which he fears to investigate, and which are hidden in a recess of his brain, as in a sanctuary which he dares not approach?

XXXV

I hear cries against impiety on every side. The Christian is impious in Asia, the Mussulman in Europe, the papist in London, the Calvinist in Paris, the Jansenist at the top of the rue St Jacques, the Molinist at the bottom of the faubourg St Médard. What is an impious person, then? Either everybody, or nobody.

XXXVI

When the pious declaim against scepticism, it seems to me that they either do not understand their own interest, or are inconsistent. If it is certain that a true faith, to be embraced, and a false faith, to be abandoned, need only be fully known, surely it must be highly desirable that universal doubt should spread over the surface of the earth, and that every race should consent to

the examination of the truth of its religion. Our missionaries would find a good half of their work already accomplished.

XXXVII

He who does not deliberately embrace the faith in which he has been bred can no more plume himself on being a Christian or a Mussulman than upon not being born blind or lame. It is his luck, not his merit.

XXXVIII

He who would die for a faith whose falsity he was aware of, would be a madman. He who dies for a false faith, which he thinks a true one, or for a true faith of whose truth he has not been convinced by proofs, is a fanatic.

The true martyr is he who dies for a true faith, whose truth has been clearly proved to him.

XXXIX

The true martyr waits for death, the enthusiast rushes towards it.

XL

He who at Mecca would insult the ashes of Mahomet, overturn his altars and disturb a mosque, would be certainly impaled and perhaps would not be canonised. Such zeal is not now in fashion. Polyeucte in our days would be a madman.

XLI

The age of revelations, of prodigies, and of extraordinary missions is no more. Christianity has no longer need of this scaffolding. A man who took

it into his head to play the part of Jonah amongst us, and rushed about the streets crying, “In three days Paris will be no more. Parisians, repent, cover yourselves with sackcloth and ashes, or in three days you will perish,” would be seized at once, and taken before a judge, who would certainly send him to the lunatic asylum. It would be no use his saying to us, “Does God love you less than the men of Nineveh: are you less guilty?” No one would waste his time in answering him, nor would wait until the date of his prophecy expired before treating him as a visionary.

Elijah may return from the other world when he pleases; men are such that it would be a miracle indeed if he were well received in this.

XLII

When a dogma which contradicts the dominant religion, or some event which is inconsistent with the tranquillity of the public, is announced, even if the mission is justified by miracles, the government does well in dealing rigorously, and the people in crying “Crucify.” How dangerous to abandon the people to the seductions of an impostor, or the dreams of a visionary! If the blood of Jesus Christ cried for vengeance against the Jews, ’tis because in shedding it they turned a deaf ear to Moses and the Prophets who foretold the Messiah. If an angel came down from heaven and supported his arguments by miracles, and yet preached against the law of Christ, Paul would call him anathema. It is not, therefore, by miracles that a man’s mission is to be judged, but by the conformity of his doctrine with that of the people to whom he declares himself sent, *especially when the doctrine of that people is proved to be true.*

XLIII

Every innovation in a government is to be feared. The holiest and best of religions, even Christianity, did not make its way without causing some

disturbances. The first sons of the Church more than once exceeded the limits of the patience and moderation recommended to them. Let me here quote some fragments of an edict of the Emperor Julian which are very characteristic of the genius of that philosophic prince and of the humours of the zealots of that day.

"I had imagined," says Julian, "that the leaders of the Galileans would be sensible of the difference between my methods and those of my predecessor, and that they would be grateful. Under his reign they suffered exile and imprisonment and a number of those they called heretics were put to the sword. Under my reign the exiles were recalled, the prisoners released, and the proscribed given again the possession of their goods. But such is the restlessness and fury of this sect that since they have lost the privilege of mutual destruction, of tormenting those who are attached to their belief and those who belong to the religion authorised by the laws, they spare no effort and let pass no occasion to stir up revolt. They are people without regard for true piety and without respect for our ordinances.... Yet we do not drag them to our altars, nor do them violence.... As to the poorer classes, it seems that they are stirred to sedition by their leaders, who are enraged at the limits We have set to their powers; for we have excluded them from our courts of law, and they have no longer the power to make away with wills and supplant the legitimate heirs, and take possession of inheritances.... That is why we forbid the people to assemble factiously and to intrigue at the homes of its seditious priests.... Let this edict strengthen the hands of our magistrates who have been more than once insulted by these insurgents, and ran the risk of being stoned. Let them meet peaceably at their leaders, and pray there, let them there receive instruction and conform to their religion; we permit this so long as they refrain from all sedition. If their meetings are an opportunity for revolt and faction, they and their property will suffer, I warn them. Unbelievers, live in peace... and you

who have remained faithful to the religion of your country and the gods of your fathers, do not persecute your fellow-men, your fellow-citizens, who are rather to be pitied for their ignorance than blamed for their wickedness. It is by reason and not by violence that men should be brought to the truth. We enjoin therefore upon you all, our faithful subjects, to leave the Galileans in peace."

Such were the sentiments of this prince who can be accused of paganism, but not of apostasy. He passed the early years of his life under different masters and in different schools, and made an unhappy choice in later life. He unfortunately decided in favour of the faith of his ancestors and the gods of his country.

XLIV

I am astonished that the works of this learned Emperor have been preserved to us. They contain passages which, though they do not affect the truth of Christianity, are by no means complimentary to certain Christians of his time, and the Fathers of the Church paid the works of their enemies the singular attention of suppressing them. It is apparently from his predecessors that Gregory the Great derived the barbarous zeal against art and letters which inflamed him. If this Pontiff had had his way we should be in the plight of the Mahometans, who have only the Koran to read. What would have been the fate of the writers of antiquity at the hands of a 'man who committed solecisms from religious motives, who thought that to observe grammatical rules was to set Jesus Christ below Donatus, and who thought himself obliged to complete the ruins of antiquity?

XLV

The divinity of the Holy Scriptures is not, however, so clearly apparent therein, that the authority of the sacred historians is completely independent

of the testimony of profane authors. Where should we be, if we had to find the finger of God in the literary form of our Bible? What sorry stuff is the Latin translation! And even the originals are not exactly masterpieces of composition. The prophets, apostles and evangelists wrote as they pleased. If we were permitted to regard the history of the Jews purely as a production of the human mind, Moses and his continuators are no rivals of Livy, Sallust, Cæsar, and Josephus, who are not suspected of being inspired. Is not the Jesuit Berruyer preferred to Moses? In our churches there are preserved pictures which we are assured are the work of angels and of the Deity himself. If these pictures were actually the work of Le Sueur or Le Brun, what could I find to say against this immemorial tradition? Perhaps nothing at all. But when I look at these celestial works, and see the rules of painting violated at every moment both in design and execution, and the truth of art everywhere absent, since I cannot suppose the author an ignoramus, I must accuse the tradition of falsity. I might make use of this analogy between these pictures and Holy Writ, if I were not well aware that it is immaterial whether their contents are well or ill written. The prophets' forte was telling the truth, not elegant composition. The Apostles died for the truth of what they preached and wrote, and for nothing else. But, to return to the matter under discussion, those profane writers should have been preserved who must have harmonised with sacred historians, — at any rate upon facts such as the existence and miracles of Christ, the qualities and character of Pontius Pilate, and the deeds and martyrdom of-the early Christians.

XLVI

An entire nation, you will say, witnesses to this fact; dare you deny it? Yes, I dare, since it is not confirmed by the authority of someone not of your side, and I do not know whether that person is free from fanaticism and

delusion. Moreover, if an author of declared impartiality tells me that a chasm opened in the midst of a city, that the gods when consulted about this event answered that it would close if the most precious possession was thrown into it, and that a brave knight leapt in and that the oracle was fulfilled; — I should be far less inclined to believe him than if he had simply said. that a chasm opened, and that considerable time and labour were required to fill it. The less probability a fact has the more does the testimony of history lose its weight. I should make no difficulty in believing a single honest man who should tell me that His Majesty had just won a complete victory over the allies; but if all Paris were to assure me that a dead man had come to life again at Passy, I should not believe a word of it. That a historian should impose upon us, or that a whole nation should be deluded — there is no miracle in that!

XLVII

Tarquin proposed to increase the corps of cavalry that Romulus had formed. An augur declared all change in the army sacrilegious, unless authorised by the gods. Angered at the opposition of the priest and determined to make an end of him and of an art which opposed his will, Tarquin had him summoned to the market-place, and said to him, “Soothsayer, is what I am thinking of possible? If your knowledge is what you boast it to be, you will be able to answer me.” The augur was not embarrassed, but consulted the birds and made answer: “Yes, Prince, what you propose is possible.” Then Tarquin, drawing a razor from beneath his gown and taking a pebble, said to the augur, “Come here and cut me this pebble with this razor, for I thought *this* possible.” Navius, for this was the augur’s name, turned to the people and said composedly, “Strike the pebble with the razor, and may I be dragged to torture on the spot if it is not immediately divided.” People saw, with surprise, the hardness of the pebble yield to the blade; it was divided

so promptly that the razor reached Tarquin's hand and drew blood. The astonished people applauded, and Tarquin renounced his scheme, and declared himself the protector of augurs. The razor and the fragments of the pebble were buried beneath an altar. A statue was put up to the augur, which was still in existence in the reign of Augustus, and both sacred and profane writers bear witness to the truth of this event, in the writings of Lactantius, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and Saint Augustine.

You have heard the story; now for superstition. "What do you say to that?" says the superstitious Quintus to his brother Cicero. "You must either admit it as a fact, or take refuge in a monstrous Pyrrhonism, treat nations and historians as fools, and burn their annals. Will you deny everything rather than allow that the gods interfere in our affairs?"

Hoc ego philosophi non arbitror testibus uti, qui out casu vert out malitia falsi fictique esse possunt. Argumentis et rationibus oportet; quart quidquid ita sit docere, non,eventis, iis præsertim quitus mihi non liceat, credere.... Omitte igitur lituum Rotnuli, quem in maxitno incendio negas potuisse comburi? Contemne cotem Accii Navii? Nihil debet esse in philos or hia commentitiis fabellis loci. IUud erat philosophe totius augurii primum. naturam ipsam videre, deinde inventionem, deinde constantiam.... Habent Etrusci exaratum puerum auctorem disciplines suce,. Nos Quem? Acciumne Navium?... Placet igitur kumanitatis expertes habere Divinitatis auctores? (Cicero, Dedivinat., lib. ii, cap. lxxx,. lxxxi).

But kings, peoples, nations, and the whole world believe it. Quasi vere quidquam sit tarn valde quam nihil sapere vulgare? Aut quasi tibi ipsi in judicando placeat multitude. This is the philosopher's reply. Tell me a single prodigy to which it does not apply. The Fathers of the Church, who doubtless found it exceedingly inconvenient to follow Cicero's principles, have preferred to accept Tarquin's adventure, and attribute the art of Navius to the Devil. A very convenient invention, the Devil.

XLVIII

Every nation has stories like this, which would be miraculous if true; which are never proved, but which serve to prove everything; which it were impious to deny, and folly to believe.

XLIX

Romulus, struck by lightning, or murdered by the senators, disappeared from Rome. The people and the soldiers murmured, the orders of the state rose one against the other, and Rome in its infancy, divided against itself and surrounded by enemies, stood on the edge of a precipice, when a certain Proculeius came forward gravely, and said: “Romans, this prince whom you regret is not dead: he has ascended to heaven, where he sits at the right hand of Jupiter. ‘Go,’ he said to me, ‘and calm your fellow-citizens; tell them that Romulus is with the gods and assure them of my protection; let them know that the forces of their enemies shall never prevail against them; their destiny is to be one day the lords of the earth. Let them hand down this prediction from age to age, and to their most distant posterity.’” Some circumstances favour imposture; and if we consider the state of things in Rome at that time, we shall agree that Proculeius was a man of intelligence and that he chose his time well He introduced into their minds a feeling which was not without its effect in determining the future greatness of his country. *Mirum est quantum illi viro hæc nuntianti fidei fuerit; quamque desiderium Romuli apud plebem facta fida immortalitatis, lenitum sit. F ant am hanc admiratio viri et pavor pressens nobilitavit; deinde a paucis initio facto, Deunt, Deo natum solvere universi Romulum jubent.*

That is to say, the people believed in this apparition; the senators pretended to believe, and Romulus had altars raised to him. But this was not all. Soon it was not only to a single individual that Romulus appeared; he

showed himself to more than a thousand people in a single day. He had not been struck by lightning, the senators had not made away with him during a storm, but he had ascended to heaven in the midst of lightnings and thunders in the sight of the people; and this story became encrusted after a time with such a quantity of additions that the thinkers of the following century must have found them highly inconvenient.

L

A single proof is more conclusive to me than fifty occurrences. Thanks to the great confidence I have in my reason, my faith is not at the mercy of the first juggler I meet with. Priest of Mahomet, you may cure the lame, make the dumb speak, give sight to the blind, cure the palsied, and raise the dead, nay, even restore to the mutilated the limbs, they have lost (a miracle hitherto unattempted), and to your great surprise my faith will not be shaken. Do you wish me to become your proselyte? Then leave these prodigies and let us reason. I trust my judgment more than my eyes.

If the religion that you announce to me is true, its truth can be demonstrated by unanswerable arguments. Find these arguments. Why pursue me with prodigies, when a syllogism serves to convince me? Do you find it easier to make a cripple stand upright than to enlighten me?

LI

A man lies on the ground, without feeling, without warmth and without movement. They turn him over and over, shake him, burn him, and nothing stirs him. A red-hot iron does not draw from him any sign of life. Is he dead? No. He is the priest of Calama, *qui quando ei placebat ad imitatas quasi lamentantis hominis voces, ita se auferebat a sensibus et jacebat simillitnus mortuo, ut non solum vellicantes atque pungentes minime sentiret, sed aliquando etiam igne uretur admoto, sine ullo doloris sensu*

nisi post modum ex vulnere. If certain people had found such a case in our times, they would have made a fine use of him; we should have seen a corpse revived on the ashes of one of the elect, and the collection of a Jansenist magistrate would have included a resurrection, and the supporters of the famous constitution would perhaps have been put to confusion.

LII

We must admit, says the logician of Port-Royal, that Saint Augustine was right in maintaining, with Plato, that our judgment of truth and our criterion for discerning it belong not to the senses but to the mind: *non est veritatis judicium in sensibus.* And even the degree of certainty we can obtain through the senses is not very extensive. There are many things which we think we learn through their medium and of which we have not a full assurance. When, therefore, the evidence of the senses is inconsistent with, or does not outweigh, the authority of reason, we have no choice; logically, we must decide for reason.

LIII

A certain street resounds with acclamations; the ashes of one of the elect work more miracles in one day than Jesus Christ during his whole life. Men run, or are carried thither, and I follow the multitude. I am no sooner arrived than I hear cries of “A miracle, a miracle!” I come nearer, and looking about I see a little cripple who walks with the aid of three or four charitable persons who hold him up; and the people, in astonishment, cry out on a miracle. Fools, where is the miracle? Do you not see the rogue has but changed his crutches? It is the same story with miracles as with spirits. I would wager that all who have seen spirits are afraid of them beforehand, and that all those who saw miracles there had made up their minds to see them.

LIV

We have a vast collection of these so-called miracles which may bid defiance to the most determined incredulity. The author is a senator, a serious man who made profession of a not very intelligent materialism, but who had nothing to gain by his conversion. An eye-witness of the events which he relates, and which he had the opportunity of examining without prejudice or bias, his evidence is accompanied by that of thousands of others. All say that they have *seen,* and their depositions are as authentic as possible; the original documents are preserved in the public archives. What is to be said? Simply that these miracles prove nothing, so long as the question of his *bona fides* is not decided.

LV

Every argument which is used by two opposing factions cuts both ways. If fanaticism has its martyrs like true religion, and if there have been fanatics among those who died for the true faith, we must either count up (if we can) the number of dead of each camp, and believe; or look for other grounds of credibility.

LVI

Nothing is more apt to confirm men in their irreligion than false inducements to conversion. Every day unbelievers are told: “Who are you to attack a religion that men such as Paul, Tertullian, Athanasius, Chrysostom, Augustine, Cyprian, and a host of illustrious persons so courageously defended? Doubtless you have observed some difficulty which has escaped these great geniuses; show that you know more than they, or else, if you admit that they are the wiser, submit your doubts to their verdict.” This is a frivolous argument The knowledge of its priests is no

proof of the truth of a religion. What faith was more absurd than the Egyptians? And what priesthood was more enlightened? “No, I cannot worship this onion; in what is it superior to other vegetables? I should be mad indeed to bow down before objects destined for my nourishment! A strange divinity, a plant that I water, and which grows and dies in my kitchen garden.”

“Silence, you wretch, your blasphemies fill me with horror. Who are you to argue? Do you know more than the sacred college? Who are you to attack the gods, and preach wisdom to their ministers? Are you wiser than the oracles that the whole world comes to question? Whatever your answer, I shall be amazed at your pride and temerity!” Will Christians never know their strength, and will they never abandon such unhappy sophisms to those who have no better argument? *Omittamur ista communia qua ex utraque parte did possunt, quanquam vere ex utraque parte did non possint.* Example, prodigies and authority may make dupes or hypocrites; reason alone can make believers.

LVII

People agree that it is of the first importance to employ none but solid arguments for the defence of a faith; yet they would gladly persecute those who attempt to cry down bad arguments. What, then, is it not enough to be a Christian? Am I also to be a Christian upon mistaken grounds? Zealots, I give you fair warning, I am not a Christian because Saint Augustine was, but because it is reasonable to be one.

LVIII

I know the zealots well, and they are quick to take alarm. If they once make up their minds that this work contains something repugnant to their ideas, I shall expect all the calumnies they have spread about a hundred better men

than myself. If they only call me a deist and a wretch, I shall get off lightly. They have long since damned Descartes, Montaigne, Locke and Bayle; and I hope that they will damn many others. I tell them that I do not pretend to be a better man nor a better Christian than most of these philosophers. I was born in the Roman, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, and I whole-heartedly submit to its decisions. I wish to die in the faith of my fathers, and I respect it as far as is possible for a man who has never held immediate intercourse with the Deity, and has never witnessed a miracle. That is my confession of faith, and I am persuaded that they will find fault with it, though perhaps not a man among them can make a better.

LIX

I have occasionally read Abbadie, Huet, and the rest I am sufficiently well acquainted with the evidences of my religion, and I admit that they are important; but were they a hundred times more so, Christianity would not be demonstrated to me to be true. Why then demand that I should believe that there are three Persons in one God as firmly as I believe that the three angles of a triangle are together equal to two right angles? Every proof ought to produce in me a certainty proportionate to its conclusiveness, and the effect of geometrical, moral and physical proofs upon my mind must be different, or else this distinction is a frivolous one.

LX

You offer an unbeliever a volume of writings of which you claim to show him the divinity. But before examining your proofs, he will be sure to put some questions about this collection. Has it always been the same? Why is it less ample now than it was some centuries ago? By what right has this or that work been banished, which another sect reveres; and this or that work been preserved, which the other has rejected? On what grounds have you

preferred this manuscript? Who guided you in your choice among so many varying copies, which are a proof that these sacred authors have not come down to you in their original purity? But if the ignorance of copyists or the malice of heretics has corrupted the text, as you will have to admit, you must restore the text to its original condition before you prove its divinity; for your proofs and my faith cannot rest upon a collection of mutilated documents. To whom will you entrust this reform? The Church. But I cannot agree to the infallibility of the Church, until the divinity of the Scriptures is proved. I am therefore reduced to scepticism.

Your only answer to all these difficulties is by the confession that the first foundations of the faith are purely human; that the choice between manuscripts, the restoration of passages, finally the collection, has been made in accordance with the rules of criticism. Well, I do not refuse the divinity of the sacred books a degree of faith proportioned to the certainty of these rules.

LXI

It was during my search for proofs that I found difficulties. The books which contain the motives of my belief offer at the same time inducements to unbelief. They are arsenals from which either party may draw weapons. I have seen the deist arm himself there against the atheist; the deist and the atheist attack the Jew; the atheist, the deist and the Jew combine against the Christian; the Christian, the deist, the atheist and the Jew oppose the Mussulman; the atheist, the deist, the Jew, and the Mussulman, and a multitude of Christian sects, attack the Christian; and the sceptic with his hand against every man. I was the umpire, and held the balance between the adversaries. It rose or fell in sympathy with the weight thrown into the scales. After long hesitation, the balance dipped in favour of the Christian,

but simply by way of reaction. I can bear witness to my own impartiality. I might have made more of this surplus. I call God to witness my sincerity,

LXII

This diversity of opinions has led the deists to imagine an argument which is perhaps more curious than solid. Cicero, having to prove that the Romans were the most warlike people in the world, skilfully extracts this admission from the lips of their rivals. Gauls, to whom, if any, do you yield the palm in courage? To the Romans. Parthians, after you, who are the bravest of men? The Romans. Africans, whom would you fear, if you were to fear any? The Romans. Let us, say the deists, interrogate the religionists in a like manner. Chinese, what religion would be the best, if yours were not the best? Naturalism. Mussulmans, what religion would you embrace if you abjured Mahomet? Naturalism. Christians, what is the true religion if it be not Christianity? Judaism. But you, O Jews, what is the true religion, if Judaism be false? Naturalism. Now, those, continues Cicero, to whom the second place is unanimously awarded and who in their turn do not cede the first place to anyone — it is those who incontestably deserve that place.

Letter on the Blind (1749)

FOR THE USE OF THOSE WHO CAN SEE

Translated by Margaret Jourdain, 1916

Original French Title: 'Lettre sur les aveugles à l'usage de ceux qui voient'

Lettre sur les aveugles à l'usage de ceux qui voient concerns the question of visual perception, a subject that had experienced a resurgence of interest due to the success of medical procedures allowing surgeons to operate on cataracts (demonstrated in 1728 by William Cheselden and 1747 by Jacques Daviel) and several cases of blindness from birth. At the time, speculations were numerous upon what the nature and use of vision was, and how much perception, habit and experience allow individuals to identify forms in space, to perceive distances and to measure volumes, or to distinguish a realistic work of art from reality.

According to Diderot's essay, a blind person that is suddenly able to see for the first time does not immediately understand what he sees and so he must spend a period of time establishing rapports between his experience of forms and distances (understandings that he first acquired by touch) and the images that were thereafter apparent to him by sight. The treatise reveals Diderot's atheist thinking that was revolutionary at the time. He was eventually imprisoned, but protection of citizens associated with the *Encyclopédie* led to his liberation after a few months.

LETTRE

SUR

LES AVEUGLES,

A L'USAGE

DE CEUX QUI VOYENT.

Possunt, nec *posse videntur*.

Virg.

A LONDRES.

M. DCC. XLIX.

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LETTER ON THE BLIND FOR THE USE OF THOSE WHO SEE



Possunt nec posse videntur. — Æneid, lib. v, 23.

IT was not more than I suspected, that the blind girl whom Monsieur de Réaumur had couched for cataract would not inform you of what you were anxious to know; but I little thought it would be neither her fault nor yours. I have in person, and by means of his best friends and by paying him many compliments, applied to her benefactor, but all in vain; the first dressing will be removed without you. Some persons of the highest distinction have had the honour of sharing this refusal with philosophers, and, in a word, he does not wish to remove the veil, except in the presence of some eyewitnesses of no great importance. If you would know why that wonderful operator makes a secret of experiments at which you think too great a number of intelligent witnesses cannot be present, my answer is, that the observations of such a celebrated person do not so much stand in need of spectators, whilst making, as of hearers when made.

Thus, disappointed, madam, I have returned to my original intention, and, since I was forced to go without an experiment in which I saw little profit would accrue to you or to me, but of which Monsieur de Réaumur will doubtless make a much better use, I set to work to philosophise with my friends upon the important matter which is the object of it. How happy should I be, if the narrative of one of our conversations might stand instead of the spectacle I so rashly promised you! The day that the Prussian operated on Simoneau’s daughter for cataract, we went to have some talk with the Puisaux man who was born blind. He is possessed of good solid sense, is known to great numbers of persons, understands a little chemistry,

and has attended the botanical lectures at the Jardin du Rot with some profit to himself. His father was a distinguished professor of philosophy at the University of Paris. He had private means, sufficient to have satisfied his remaining senses, but a taste for pleasure led him into some excesses in his youth; people took advantage of his weaknesses, his affairs became embarrassed, and finally he withdrew to a little town in the provinces, from whence he pays a yearly visit to Paris, bringing with him liqueurs which give great satisfaction. These, madam, are not very philosophic details, but for that very reason are likely to convince you that the person I am speaking of is not imaginary.

We arrived at our blind man's house about five o'clock in the afternoon, and we found him busy teaching his son to read with raised letters. He had only been up an hour, for I must tell you the day begins for him when it is ending for us. His custom is to look after his household affairs and to work while others are asleep. At midnight nothing interrupts him, and he is in no one's way. His first care is to set in its place everything that has been displaced during the day, and when his wife wakes she generally finds the house tidy. The difficulty the blind have in finding things that are mislaid makes them orderly, and I have observed that their intimates also share this quality, either from the effect of the good example of the blind, or from a feeling of compassion towards them. How unhappy would the blind be without the little attentions of those about them! — nay, we ourselves feel the want of them. Great services are like the large gold or silver coins that we rarely make use of, but small attentions are small change which is always passing from hand to hand.

This blind man is a good judge of symmetry. Symmetry, which is perhaps a matter of pure convention among us, is certainly so in many respects between a blind man and the sighted. A blind man studies by his touch that disposition required between the parts of a whole to enable it to

be called beautiful; and then at length attains to a just application of that term. But in saying “that is beautiful,” he does not form an opinion, it is no more than repeating the judgment of those who see; and is not this the case of three-fourths of those who give their opinion on a play or a book? Beauty for the blind is but a word when divorced from utility, and, wanting an organ, how many things are there the utility of which escapes them? Are not the blind very much to be pitied in accounting nothing beautiful unless it be likewise good? How many admirable things are lost to them! The only compensation for their loss is that their ideas of beauty, though less extensive, are more definite than those of many keen-sighted philosophers who have written prolix treatises on the subject. This blind man often speaks of mirrors. You think he does not know the meaning of the word, yet he is never known to put a glass in a wrong light. He speaks as sensibly as we on the qualities and defects of the organ which he lacks. If he attaches no idea to the terms he makes use of, yet he has the advantage over most other men that he never uses them wrongly. He speaks so wisely and so well of so many things absolutely unknown to him, that his conversation would considerably lessen the weight of that inference which, without knowing wherefore, we all draw from what passes in ourselves to what passes within the minds of others.

I asked him what he meant by a mirror?— “An instrument,” answered he, “ which sets things in relief at a distance from themselves, when properly placed with regard to it. It is like my hand, which, to feel an object, I must not put on one side of it.”

Had Descartes been born blind, he might, I think, have hugged himself for such a definition. Pray consider what an ingenious combination of ideas it implies. This blind man’s only knowledge of objects is by touch. He knows by hearing other men say so that they know objects by sight as he knows them by touch; at any rate that is the only idea he can form of the

process. He also knows that we cannot see our own face though we can touch it. Sight, he therefore concludes, is a kind of touch which extends to distant objects and is not applied to our face. Touch gives him an idea only of relief. Therefore, he concludes, a mirror is an instrument that represents us in relief outside ourselves. How many famous philosophers have laboured with less subtlety to arrive at conclusions equally erroneous! But if a mirror astonished our blind man, how much greater was his surprise when we told him that there are instruments which magnify objects, while others remove them without duplicating them, put them out of their place, bring them nearer, remove them farther, and reveal the minutest details to the eyes of naturalists; while others again multiply objects a thousand times, and others appear to change the figure of objects completely. He asked us a hundred curious questions concerning these phenomena. For instance, he asked us if only persons who were called naturalists could see with the microscope, and if only astronomers could see with the telescope; if the instrument for enlarging objects were bigger than that for diminishing them; if that which brings them nearer were shorter than that for removing them farther off. But what puzzled him was that the other self, which according to him the mirror represents in relief, should not be tactile.

“So this little instrument,” said he, “sets two senses to contradict one another; a more perfect instrument would perhaps reconcile these contradictions, without the object being ever more real for that, and perhaps a third instrument, still more perfect and less illusory, would cause these contradictions to disappear and show us our error.

“And what are eyes, do you suppose?” asked Monsieur de — . “An organ,” replied the blind man, “on which the air has the effect this stick has on my hand.” That answer amazed us, and while we gazed at one another in astonishment he continued: “When I place my hand between your eyes and

an object, my hand is present to you but the object is absent. The same thing happens when I reach for one thing with my stick and come across another."

Madam, only turn to Descartes' *Dioptrics*, and there you will see the phenomena of sight illustrated by those of touch, and the plates full of men busied in seeing with sticks. Descartes, and all the later writers, have not been able to give us clearer ideas of vision; and that great philosopher was, in this respect, no more superior to the blind man than a common man who has the use of his eyes.



FIG. I.

The above figure is an enlarged reproduction of the cut in the original edition of the Letter on the Blind. In the Discours de la méthode, *plus la dioptrique, les météores*, *la mécanisme et la musique* (Leyden, 1637), blind people trying to see with sticks are often repeated, but these are small figures

only an inch in height dressed as beggars and accompanied by a dog. Diderot probably refers to an edition by P. N. Poisson of this work (1724). — (A)

No one thought of asking him questions as to painting and writing, but it is obvious that his comparison would fit in with every question, and I make no doubt but that he would have told us that to try to read or to see without eyes was like looking for a pin with a thick stick. We only talked to him about those kinds of glasses which exhibit objects in relief, and which are both so very similar to and so very different from mirrors; but these we perceived rather contradicted than coincided with his idea of a looking-glass, and he was apt to think that a painter might perhaps paint a looking-glass, and thus it came to represent objects in colours.

We saw him thread very fine needles. May I ask you, madam, to suspend your reading for a while and try what you would do in his place? In case you do not light upon any expedient, I will tell you of our blind man's. He takes the eye of the needle transversely between his lips and in the same direction as his mouth, then by his tongue and suction he draws in the thread, which follows his breath unless it is much too thick for the eye; but in that case a man with sight is in the same difficulty as the blind.

He has a surprising memory for sounds, and can distinguish as many differences in voices as we can in faces. He finds in these an infinite number of delicate gradations which escape us because we have not the same interest in observing them. For us, these shades of difference are like our own countenance. Of all the men we have seen, the one we least remember is our own self. We notice faces to recognise people; and if we do not remember our own, it is because we are never liable to mistake ourselves for another person or another for ourselves. Moreover, the mutual aid our senses lend stands in the way of their perfection. This will not be the only occasion where I shall have to remark upon this.

On this head our blind man said: “That he should think himself a pitiable object in wanting those advantages which we enjoy, and that he should have been inclined to consider us as superior beings had he not a hundred times found us very much inferior to him in other respects.” This reflection led to another. This blind man, we said, values himself as much as, and perhaps more than, we who see. Why then, if the brute reasons (and it is scarce to be doubted), why on weighing its advantages over man as better known to it than those of man over it, should it not make a similar inference? He has arms, perhaps says the gnat, but I have wings. He has weapons, says the lion, but have we not claws? The elephant would look on us as insects; and all the animals, while allowing us reason, with which we should at the same time stand in great need of their instinct, would claim that with their instinct they could do very well without our reason. We have such a strong desire to exaggerate our qualities, and make little of our defects, that it would seem man’s part to write a treatise on force, and animals’ on reason.

One of our company bethought him of asking our blind man if he would like to have eyes. “If it were not for curiosity,” he replied, “I would just as soon have long arms: it seems to me my hands would tell me more of what goes on in the moon than your eyes or your telescopes; and besides, eyes cease to see sooner than hands to touch. I would be as well off if I perfected the organ I possess, as if I obtained the organ which I am deprived of.”

Our blind man points with such exactness at the place whence a noise comes that I make no doubt the blind may, by practice, become very dexterous and very dangerous. I will tell you a story which will convince you how imprudent it would be to stand the throwing of a stone or discharging of a pistol by a blind man, were he in the least used to that weapon. He had in his youth a quarrel with one of his brothers, who came off badly. Provoked at some insulting language, he seized the first missile

which came to hand, threw it at him, and hit him directly on the forehead, so as to lay him flat on the ground.

This, with some other occurrences of the like kind, caused him to be brought before the police. The outward show of power, which affects us so strongly, is as nothing to the blind. Our blind man appeared before the magistrate, as before an equal; menaces did not intimidate him. “What will you do to me?” he asked Monsieur Hérault. “I will commit you to a dungeon,” answered the magistrate. “Ah, sir,” the blind man replied, “I have been in one for twenty-five years.” There was an answer, madam; and what a text for one who is so fond of moralising as your humble servant! We quit life as we would a charming scene, the blind leave it as a dungeon; and if we have more pleasure in living than he, he has less reluctance to meet his end.

The blind man of Puisaux judges of his nearness to the fire by the degrees of heat; of the fulness of vessels by the sound made by liquids which he pours into them; of the proximity of bodies by the action of the air on his face. He is so sensitive to the least atmospheric change, that he can distinguish between a street and a closed alley. He is an extremely good judge of the weight of bodies and the capacity of vessels; and he has trained his arms to be such an exact balance, his fingers to be such skilful compasses, that in this kind of statics I would always back our blind man against twenty persons with all their eyes about them. The smooth surface of bodies has as many shades of difference for him as the sound of voices, and there is no risk of his mistaking his wife for another, unless he was to be the gainer by the change. Yet it is very probable that among a blind people wives would be in common, or their laws against adultery must be severe indeed, so very easy would it be for wives to deceive their husbands by concerting a sign with their gallants.

He judges of beauty by touch — that is easy to understand; but what is not so easy to grasp is that his judgment is influenced by pronunciation and the sound of a voice. Anatomists ought to tell us if there is any relation between the parts of the mouth and the palate and the exterior conformation of the face. He can turn small articles on the lathe, and do needlework; he levels with a square; he puts together and takes to pieces simple machines. He is so far skilled in music as to play a piece when he has been told the notes and their value. He judges of the duration of time much more accurately than we by the succession of actions and of thoughts. A smooth skin, firm flesh, an elegant shape, sweet breath, charm of voice and graceful pronunciation are qualities he prizes very highly.

He married to have eyes of his own. Before this, he had an idea of taking a deaf man as his partner, to whom he could lend ears in exchange for eyes. I could not sufficiently wonder at his singular address in a great many things; and on our expressing our surprise, “I perceive, gentlemen,” said he, “ that you are not blind: you are astonished at what I do, and why not as much at my speaking?” There is more philosophy, I believe, in this answer of his than he was aware of. The facility with which we are brought to speak is not a little surprising. We have a number of ideas which cannot be represented by sensible objects, and which have no substance, as it were, and we are obliged to find terms for them by making use of a number of ingenious and profound analogies observed between them and the ideas they suggest. Thus a blind man should find greater difficulty in learning to speak because there is a much larger number of imperceptible objects in his world, and thus his field for comparing and combining is much more limited. How, for example, can he rightly use the word *expression* (of countenance)? It is the same of many things imperceptible to the blind; and for us who see, it is often found hard to explain very precisely what it is. If it largely resides in the eye, touch will be useless; and what does a blind

man make of dead eyes, or sparkling or expressive eyes? I infer from thence that we unquestionably derive great advantages from the concurrence of our senses and our organs; still, it would be quite another thing did we use them separately, and never employed two when one would suffice. To add touch to sight, when sight would do the business, is like putting to a carriage with two stout horses a third, which will draw one way while the others draw another.

As to me it has always been very clear that the state of our organs and our senses has a great influence on our metaphysics and our morality, and that those ideas which seem purely intellectual are closely dependent on the conformation of our bodies, I put some questions to the blind man about the virtues and vices. The first thing I remarked was his extreme abhorrence of theft; possibly from two reasons — firstly, the facility with which people could steal from him unobserved, and secondly (and still more perhaps*),* because he could be immediately seen were he to go about filching. Not that he is at any loss to secure himself against that sense which he knows we have above him, or that he is clumsy at hiding what he might steal. Modesty he makes no great account of. If it were not for the weather, against which clothes are a protection, he would hardly understand their use; and he openly admits he cannot see why one part of the body should be hidden rather than another; and still less by what caprice some of those parts should be especially singled out, which from their use and the indispositions to which they are subject ought rather to be kept free. Though living in an age when philosophy has rid us of a great number of prejudices, I do not think we shall ever arrive at such complete insensibility to the prerogatives of modesty as this blind man. Diogenes would have been no philosopher in his account.

As of all the external signs which raise our pity and ideas of pain the blind are affected only by cries, I have in general no high thought of their

humanity. What difference is there to a blind man between a man making water and one bleeding in silence? Do not we ourselves cease to be compassionate when distance or the smallness of the objects produces on us the same effect as deprivation of sight upon the blind? So much do our virtues depend on the sensations we receive, and the degree by which we are affected by external things. I don't doubt that if it were not for the fear of punishment, many people would find it less disagreeable to kill a man at a distance at which he would appear no bigger than a swallow, than to cut an ox's throat with their own hands. We pity a horse in pain, and we make nothing of crushing an ant; and is it not by the same principle that we are moved? Ah, madam, how different is the morality of the blind from ours? How different would that of a deaf man likewise be from his? And to one with a sense more than we have, how deficient would our morality appear — to say nothing more? Our metaphysics and theirs agree no better. How many of their principles are mere absurdities to us, and *vice versâ*? Concerning this I might enter into details, which I am pretty certain would amuse you, but which certain people, who make a crime of everything, would not fail to exclaim against as profanity and infidelity, as if it were in my power to make the blind perceive things otherwise than they do. I will content myself with one observation, which everyone must allow, and that is, that the great argument for the wonders of nature falls flat upon the blind. The facility with which we create (if I may say so) new objects by means of a little glass, is something more incomprehensible to them than the stars which they have been condemned never to see. This luminous globe which moves from east to west surprises them less than a small fire which they can increase or diminish at will; and as they see matter in a more abstract manner than we do, they are less indisposed to believe that it thinks.

If a man who had had sight only for a day or two found himself in the midst of a blind people, he would either have to hold his peace or be considered a brain-sick fool. Every day he would come out with some new wonder, which would only be such to them, and which their free-thinkers would oppose tooth and nail. Might not the apologists of religion greatly avail themselves of such a stubborn unbelief, which, however just in some respects, is yet so very ill-founded? Be pleased to dwell only a little upon this supposition; it will remind you of the persecutions undergone by those poor wretches who discovered truth in the dark ages and were rash enough to reveal it to their blind contemporaries, and found their bitterest enemies were those who from their circumstances and education would have seemed most likely to receive it willingly.

So much for the morals and metaphysics of the blind. I now pass on to less important matters, which have nevertheless lately been the chief subject of observation with regard to the blind ever since the Prussian oculist's arrival, First question: How can a man born blind form ideas of figures? By the movements of his own body and by stretching his hand in various directions, by passing his fingers continuously over an object, he gets an idea of space. If he passes his fingers along a taut thread, he obtains the idea of a straight line; if he follows the curve of a slack thread, that of a curve. In a more general sense, by repeated usage of the sense of touch, he has a memory of sensations experienced at different points; and he is capable of combining these sensations or points and forming figures. A straight line for a blind man who is not a geometrician is but the memory of a series of sensations of touch upon a taut thread; a curve, the memory of a series of tactile sensations referred to the surface of some concave or convex solid. In the case of a geometrician, study corrects the idea of these lines by their properties which he discovers. But whether geometrician or no, the man born blind refers everything to his fingers' ends. We combine coloured

points, he only palpable points, or, to speak more precisely, only such tactile sensations as he remembers. He does not go through a mental process analogous to ours; he does not create an image, for to do this it is necessary to colour a background and mark upon it points of a different colour from that background. Make these points of the same colour as the ground, and they are at once lost in it, and the figure disappears; at any rate, that is the case in my imagination, and I suppose all imaginations are alike. When I propose to perceive in my head a straight line otherwise than by its properties, I begin by spreading in it a white cloth, against which I set out a series of black points in the like direction. The stronger the colour of the ground and points, the clearer my perception of the points. To view in my imagination a figure of a colour resembling that of the ground, puts me to no less trouble than if out of myself and on a canvas. You see then, madam, that laws might be given for imagining with ease various objects variously coloured, but such laws are by no means calculated for one born blind. Such a man who cannot colour (and consequently cannot figure as we understand it) only remembers such sensation as one derives from touch, which he refers to different points, places and distances, and of which he composes figures. I believe that we who see never imagine any shape without colouring it, and that if we are given little balls in the dark, whose substance and colour are unknown to us, we shall immediately think of them as black or white, or some other colour; and that if we did not, we, like the blind man, should have the remembrance only of little sensations excited at our fingers ends, and such as little round bodies may occasion. If this remembrance be very fleeting with us, if we have very little idea how one born blind fixes, recalls and combines the sensations of touch, it is owing to the custom we derive from our eyes of realising everything in our imagination by means of colours. It has happened, however, that during the agitations of a violent passion I felt a thrill run through my whole hand, and

I felt the impression of the bodies I had touched some time ago revived as vividly as if they had been still present to my touch, and I realised very distinctly that the limits of sensation exactly coincided with those of these absent bodies. Although sensation by itself is indivisible, it occupies, if one may use the word, an extension in space to which the blind man is able to add and subtract mentally by enlarging or diminishing the parts affected. By this means he compares points, surfaces, and solids; and he could imagine a solid as large as this terrestrial globe, if he were to imagine his fingers' ends as large as this globe, and occupied by sensation in its, length, breadth, and depth. I know of nothing which is a better proof of the reality of this internal sense than this faculty, weak in us, but strong in those born blind, of feeling or recalling the sensation of bodies when they are absent and no longer acting on us. We cannot make a blind man understand how imagination represents absent objects as present to us, but we can easily recognise in ourselves the faculty that the blind possess of feeling at one's fingers' ends an absent body. To do this, press the forefinger and thumb together, shut your eyes; separate your fingers, and immediately after this separation examine yourself and tell me if the sensation does not linger after the pressure has ceased; if, while the pressure lasted, your mind appears to be in your head rather than at the ends of your fingers, and if this pressure does not convey the nature of a surface by the space which the sensation occupies? We only distinguish the presence of external things from their picture in our imagination by the strength or weakness of the impression; and similarly, the blind only distinguish the sensation from the actual presence of an object at their fingers' ends, by the strength or weakness of that sensation.

If ever a philosopher, blind and deaf from his birth, were to construct a man after the fashion of Descartes, I can assure you, madam, that he would put the seat of the soul at the fingers' ends, for thence the greater part of the

sensations and all his knowledge are derived. Who is to inform him that his head is the seat of his thoughts? If the labours of the imagination tire our brain, this is because the effort we make to imagine is somewhat similar to that to perceive very near or very small objects. But this would not be the case with a man blind and deaf from his birth, for the sensations which he has gathered from touch will be the world, so to speak, of all his ideas, and I should not be surprised if, after a profound meditation, his fingers were as wearied as our heads. I am not afraid that a philosopher might object to such an one that the nerves cause our sensations and that they all start from the brain. Were these two propositions fully demonstrated, which is very far from being the case, especially the former, an exposition of all the dreams of naturalists on this head would be sufficient to confirm him in his opinion.

But if the imagination of the blind man be no more than the faculty of calling to mind and combining sensations of palpable points; and of a sighted man, the faculty of combining and calling to mind visible or coloured points, the person born blind consequently perceives things in a much more abstract manner than we; and in questions purely speculative, he is perhaps less liable to be deceived.

For abstraction consists in separating in thought the perceptible qualities of a body, either from one another, or from the body itself in which they are inherent; and error arises where this separation is done in a wrong way or at a wrong time — in a wrong way in metaphysical questions, or at a wrong time in applied mathematics. There is perhaps one certain method of falling into error in metaphysics, and that is, not sufficiently to simplify the subject under investigation; and an infallible secret for obtaining incorrect results in applied mathematics is to suppose objects less compounded than they usually are.

There is one kind of abstraction of which so few are capable that it seems reserved for purely intellectual beings, and that is that by which everything

would be reduced to numerical units. We must admit that the results of this geometry would be very exact, and its formulas very comprehensive, for there are no objects, either possible or actually existent, which these simple units could not represent, by points, lines, surfaces, solids, thoughts, ideas, sensations, etc.; and if this should prove to be the foundation of Pythagoras's doctrine, he might be said to have failed in his aim, his mode of philosophising being too much above us, and too near that of the Supreme Being, who, according to the ingenious phrase of an English geometrician, always geometrises in the universe.

But units pure and simple are too vague and general symbols for us. Our senses bring us back to symbols more suited to our comprehension and the conformation of our organs. We have arranged that these signs should be common property and serve, as it were, for the staple in the exchange of our ideas. We have made them for our eyes in the alphabet, and for our ears in articulate sounds; but we have none for the sense of touch, although there is a way of speaking to this sense and of obtaining its responses. For lack of this language, there is no communication between us and those born deaf, blind, and mute. They grow, but they remain in a condition of mental imbecility. Perhaps they would have ideas, if we were to communicate with them in a definite and uniform manner from their infancy; for instance, if we were to trace on their hands the same letters we trace on paper, and associated always the same meaning with them.

Is not this language, madam, as good as another? Is it not ready to hand, and would you dare to say that you have never been communicated with by this method? Nothing remains but to fix it, and make its grammar and dictionaries, if it is found that the expression by the common characters of writing is too slow for the sense of touch. Knowledge has three entrances by which it reaches our mind, and we keep one barricaded for want of signs. If the two others had been neglected we should now be little better than

beasts. Just as a pressure Is the only sign we have to the touch, so a cry would have been the only sign to the hearing. We have to lose one sense before we realise the advantage of symbols given to the remainder, and people who have the misfortune to be born deaf, blind, and mute, or who have lost these three senses by some accident, would be delighted if there existed a clear and precise language of touch.

It is much easier to use symbols already invented than to invent them, as one is obliged to do when there are none current. What an advantage it would have been for Saunderson to find an arithmetic arranged with signs for the touch all ready to hand at the age of five, instead of having to invent it at twenty-five! This Saunderson, madam, is another blind man whose story you will be interested to hear. Wonderful stories, indeed, are told of him, and yet there is not one to which, from his attainments in literature and his skill in mathematics, we may not safely give credit He used the same machine for algebraical calculations and for the description of rectilinear figures. You would be interested in an account of this if intelligible, and you will see my description assumes no more knowledge on your part than you actually possess, and that it would be very useful to you if you should ever want to make long calculations by touch.

Imagine a square such as you see in figures 2 and 3, divided into four equal parts by lines perpendicular to the sides, in such a way that it gives nine points, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9. Suppose this square perforated with nine holes to hold pins of two kinds, both of the same length and thickness, but one kind with a head larger than that of the other.

The large-headed pins are only placed in the centre of the square, the small-headed pins only on the sides, except in the single case of zero. Zero is marked by a large-headed pin placed in the centre of the small square which has no pin set on the sides. The figure 1 is represented by a small-headed pin, placed in the centre of the square, which has no pin set on its

sides. The figure 2, by a large-headed pin placed in the centre of the square, and by a smallheaded pin placed in one of the sides at the point I. The figure 3, by a large-headed pin placed in the centre of the square, and by a small-headed pin placed in one of its sides at the point 2. The figure 4, by a large-headed pin placed in the centre of the square, and by a small-headed pin placed in one of the sides at the point 3. The figure 5, by a largeheaded pin placed in the centre of the square, and by a small-headed pin placed in one of the sides at the point 4. The figure 6, by a large-headed pin placed in the centre of the square, and by a small-headed pin placed in one of its sides at the point 5. The figure 7, by a large-headed pin placed in the centre of the square, and by a small-headed pin placed in one of the sides at the point 6. The figure 8, by a largeheaded pin placed in the centre of the square, and by a small-headed pin placed in one of the sides at the point 7. The figure 9, by a large-headed pin placed in the centre of the square, and by a small-headed pin placed in one of the sides at the point 8.

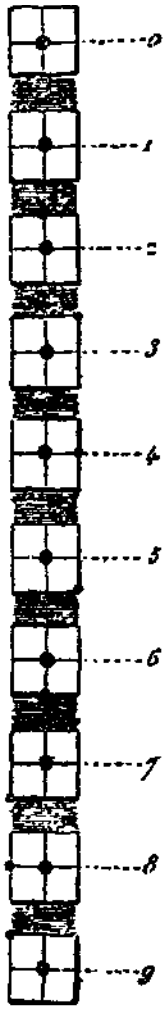


FIG. 3.

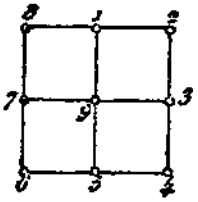


FIG. 2.

This gives ten different symbols for the sense of touch, each of which corresponds to one of our ten arithmetical characters. Now imagine a board as large as you choose, divided into small squares arranged horizontally and separated by a small space one from the other, as you see in fig. 4, and you have Saunderson's instrument You can easily see that there is no number which cannot be expressed in the tablet, and hence no arithmetical process which cannot be carried out therein.

Suppose, for example, that we want to find the sum of, or to add, the nine following numbers: —

1	2	3	4	5
2	3	4	5	6
3	4	5	6	7
4	5	6	7	8
5	6	7	8	9
6	7	8	9	0
7	8	9	0	1
8	9	0	1	2
9	0	1	2	3

I write them on the table in the order they are named: the first figure on the left of the first number, on the first square to the left of the first line; the second figure on the left of the first number, on the second square on the left of the same line, and so on.

I place the second number in the second row of squares; units are units, tens are tens, etc.

I place the third number in the third row of squares, and so on, as you see in fig. 4. Next, touching with my fingers each vertical row from the top to the bottom, beginning with that which is most to my left, I add together the numbers therein expressed; and I write the tens that are, over at the end of that column.

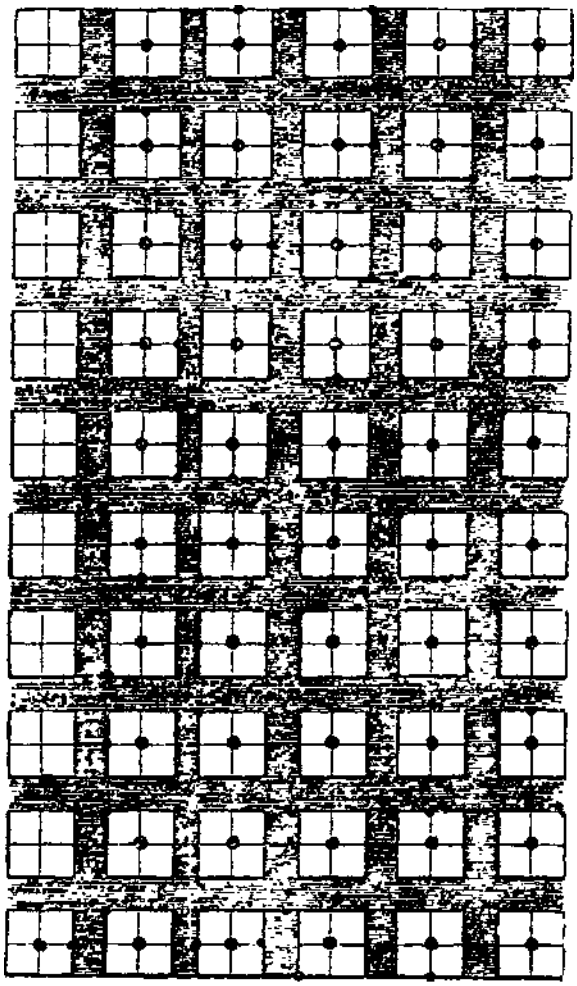


FIG. 4.

I pass to the second column, moving leftward, and work in this way; thence to the third, and so on completing my addition.

This is how the same tablet served him to prove the properties of rectilinear figures. Supposing he had to prove that parallelograms which have the same base and same height are equal in area, he placed his pins as you see in fig. 5; he added names to the angles, and proceeded with the proof with his fingers.

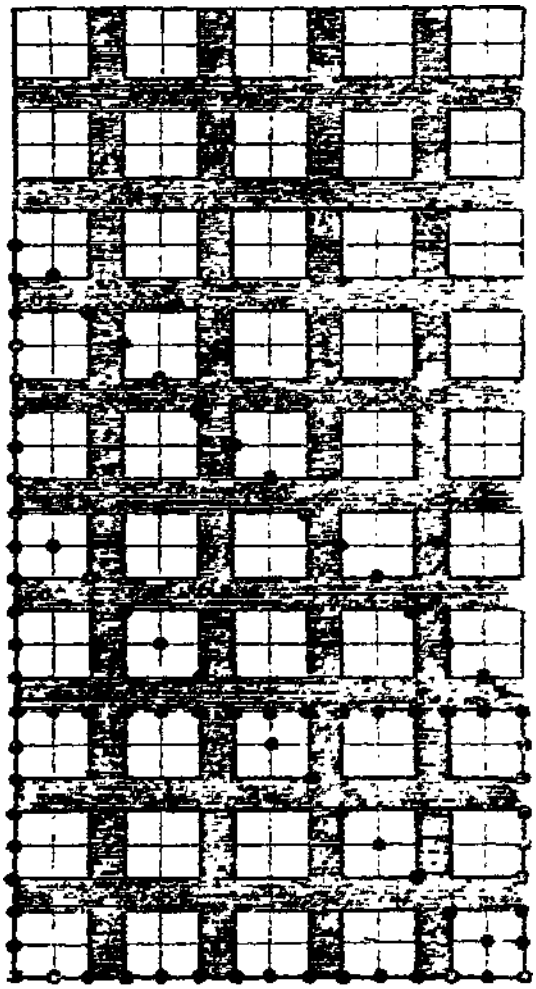


FIG. 5.

Supposing that Saunderson only used large-headed pins to mark the limits of his fingers, he could arrange round these small-headed pins of nine different varieties with all of which he was familiar. Thus he was never at a loss, except in cases where the great number of angular points which he was obliged to name in his proof forced him to have recourse to the letters of the alphabet. We are not told how he used them.

We only know that his fingers moved over his tablet with astonishing rapidity; that he made the longest calculations successfully; that he could interrupt them, and recognise when he was in error; that he could verify

them with ease; and that this work did not take him as much time as one might imagine, because he could arrange his tablet to suit his convenience.

This arrangement consisted in placing largeheaded pins in the centre of all the squares. This done, he had only to fix their value by small-headed pins, except in the case when he wished to express an unit, in that case he put a small-headed pin in the centre of the square, in place of the largeheaded pin.

Sometimes, instead of forming a complete line with pins, he only placed them at all the angles or points of intersection, and round these he stretched silk threads which completed his figures. (See fig. 6.)

He left several other instruments which facilitated his geometrical studies; the use he made of these is not known, and more acumen would perhaps be required to discover this than to solve some problem in integral calculus.



Let some geometrician try to discover the function of four pieces of solid wood in the form of rectangular paralielopipeds, each 11 inches by wide and a little more than half an inch thick, and whose two larger opposite surfaces were divided into small squares similar to the abacus 1 have just described; but with this difference, that they were only perforated at certain points, in which pins were driven in up to their head. Each surface had nine small arithmetical tablets, each with ten numbers, and each of these ten numbers was composed of ten figures. Fig. 7 represents one of the small tablets, and here are the numbers it contained: —

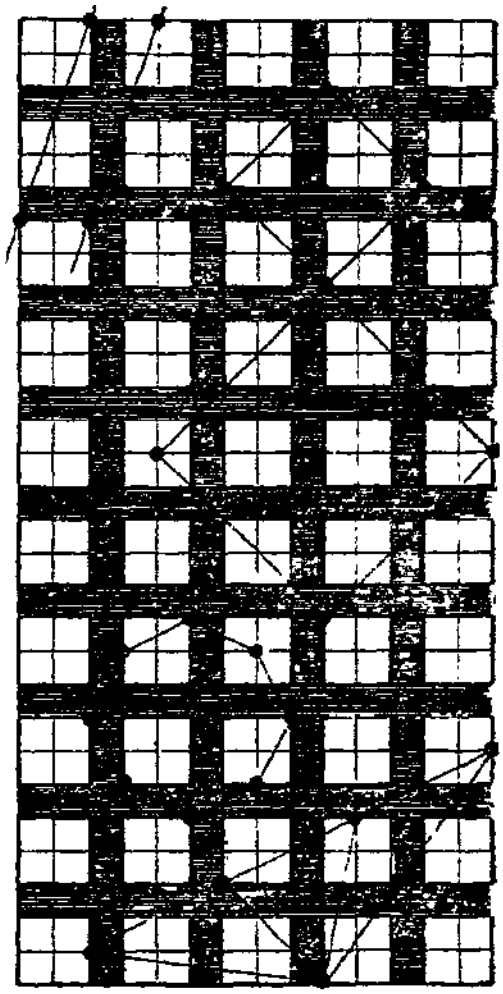


FIG. 6.

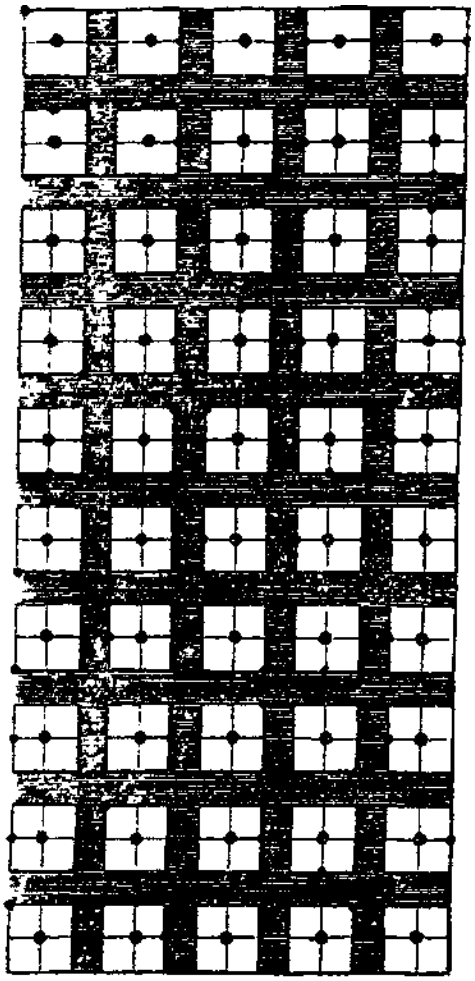


FIG. 7.

9	4	0	8	4
2	4	1	8	6
4	1	7	9	2
5	4	2	8	4
6	3	9	6	8
7	1	8	8	0
7	8	5	6	8
8	4	3	5	8
8	9	4	6	4
9	4	0	3	0

He was the author of an excellent work of its kind — *The Elements of Algebra [*Printed in London, a year after Saunderson's death, at the expense of Cambridge University. In 1756 de Joncourt translated it, with some

additional remarks (Amsterdam, 2 vols.). — (Br)] — where the only signs of his blindness are the peculiarity of certain demonstrations which a sighted man would probably not have thought of. To him we owe the division of the cube into six equal pyramids whose apex is at the centre of the cube and the base of each is one of its faces. This is used by him as a simple proof that every pyramid is the third of a prism having the same height and the same base. His taste for mathematics, his small means, and the advice of his friends decided him to give public lectures. His marvellous facility for clear demonstration encouraged his friends to think he would prove a successful teacher, for he taught his pupils as if they could not see, and a blind man who makes himself clear to the blind must be doubly lucid to the sighted; it is a telescope the more.

His biographers say that his talk abounded in happy expressions, and I can well believe it. But “What do you mean by happy expressions?” you will perhaps inquire. I answer, madam, it is using expressions to one sense (touch, for example) which are also metaphorical to another sense (say, sight): as a result, a double light is shed on the subject for the hearer, the direct light of the natural use of the expression and the reflected light of the metaphor. It is evident that in these cases, Saunderson, with all his intelligence, was not aware of the full force of the terms he employed, since he only realised half of the ideas attached to these terms. But does not this happen to all of us at times? It may happen to idiots, who sometimes make excellent jokes, and clever folk who say a foolish thing, without either being aware of it. I have observed the want of words produces the like effect in foreigners, who in an unfamiliar language are obliged to say everything in very few words, some of which they unknowingly use very happily. But every language being to writers of a lively imagination deficient in fit words, they are in the same case as clever foreigners: the situations invented by them, the delicate gradations they perceive in

characters, the natural scenes they draw, are continually leading them away from ordinary locutions and causing them to adopt turns of phrases which never fail to charm when they are neither precious nor obscure. These are faults which are more or less readily forgiven, according to the reader's wit and knowledge of the language. This is why M. de M — [Naigeon, and after him the editor of 1S1S. have inserted, instead of the initials M. *de M.*... in the original edition, M. de Montesquieu. This is a great mistake; Diderot himself has given M. de Marivaux in the index of the 1749 and 1751 editions. The *Esprit des Lois* appeared in 1748, which might have caused this error on the part of the editors, who had not consulted the index. — (Br)] is the French author who most pleases the English, and Tacitus, of all the classics, bears the bell among the thinkers; they do not attend to the licences of the style, it is only the truth of the expression which strikes them.

Saunderson was extremely successful as professor of mathematics at the University of Cambridge. He gave lessons in optics, he lectured on the nature of light and colours, he explained the theory of vision; he wrote on the properties of lenses, the phenomena of the rainbow, and many other subjects connected with sight and its organ.

These facts lose much of their marvellous character when you consider that there are three distinct elements in a question in which both physics and geometry enter — the phenomenon to be explained, the hypotheses of the geometrician, and the resultant calculation. Now it is manifest that, however great the penetration of the blind man, the phenomena of light and colour are unknown to him. The hypotheses he will understand, as all of them relate to palpable causes; but the geometrician's reason for preferring them to others will be out of his ken, as in order to see that he must be able to compare the hypotheses themselves with the phenomena. Therefore the blind man takes the hypotheses for what they are given him, a ray of light

for a fine and elastic thread, or for a succession of minute bodies striking our eyes with incredible velocity, and he makes his calculations accordingly. The transition is made from physics to geometry, and the question becomes purely mathematical.

But what are we to think of the results of the calculation? Firstly, that it is sometimes extremely difficult to obtain them, and that it would be to little purpose that a man of science could form the most plausible hypotheses, were he not able to verify them by geometry; accordingly the greatest physicists, Galileo, Descartes, and Newton, were great geometricians. Secondly, the results are more or less certain, as the preliminary hypotheses are more or less complex. When the calculation is based on a simple hypothesis, the conclusions have the validity of geometrical proofs. When there are a great many suppositions, the probability of each hypothesis being true diminishes in the ratio of the number of these hypotheses; but on the other hand increases owing to the improbability that so many false hypotheses could be mutually corrective and produce a result confirmed by the phenomena. A parallel to this would be an addition, of which the sum was correct although the sum of groups of numbers had been wrongly added up. We must admit that such a result is possible, but at the same time you see that it would very seldom prove so.

The greater the number of numbers to be added, the greater the probability of error in the addition of each, but at the same time this probability is lessened if the result of the operation be right. There are therefore a number of hypotheses, the certainty resulting from which would be the least possible. If I make A plus B plus C equal to 50, must I conclude from 50 being the real quantity of the phenomena that the suppositions represented by the letters A, B, C are true? Not at all, for there are numberless ways of subtracting from one of these letters and adding to the

others which would always give 50 as the result. But the case of three combined hypotheses is perhaps one of the most disfavourable.

One advantage of calculation which I must not omit is, that the contrariety found between the result and the phenomenon excludes false hypotheses. If a man of science proposes to find the curve formed by a ray of light in passing through the atmosphere, he must regulate himself by the density of the strata of air, the law of refraction, the nature and form of the luminous corpuscles, and perhaps other essential factors which he does not include in his calculation, either because he does not know them or because he deliberately leaves them out of consideration. He then determines the curvature of the ray. If the actual curve differs from that of his calculation, his hypotheses are incomplete or false. If the actual curvature agrees with that of his calculation, there are two alternatives: first that his hypotheses were mutually corrective, secondly that they were correct. But which is true? He does not know, and yet that is the certitude to which he can attain.

I read Saunderson's Elements of Algebra carefully in hopes of meeting what I was desirous of knowing from those who knew him intimately, and who have related some particulars of his life; but my curiosity was baffled, and it occurred to me that elements of geometry from him would have been a work both more singular in itself and of greater use to us. We should have found in it definitions of point, line, surface, solid, angle, intersections of lines, and planes, in which I make no question but he would have proceeded on principles of very abstract metaphysics, closely allied to that of the idealists. Those philosophers, madam, are termed idealists who, conscious only of their own existence and of a succession of external sensations, do not admit anything else; an extravagant system which should to my thinking have been the offspring of blindness itself; and yet, to the disgrace of the human mind and philosophy, it is the most difficult to combat, though the most absurd. It is set forth with equal candour and lucidity by Doctor

Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne, in three dialogues. It were to be wished that the author of the Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge would take this work into examination; he would there find matter for useful, agreeable, and ingenious observation — for which, in a word, no person has a better talent. Idealism deserves an attack from his hand, and this hypothesis is a double incentive to him from its singularity, and much more from the difficulty of refuting it in accordance with his principles, which are the same as those of Berkeley. According to both, and according to reason, the terms essence, matter, substance, agent, etc., of themselves convey very little light to the mind. Moreover, as the author of the *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge* judiciously observes, whether we go up to the heavens, or down to the deeps, we never get beyond ourselves, and it is only our own thoughts that we perceive. And this is the conclusion of Berkeley's first dialogue, and the foundation of his entire system. Would you not be curious to see a trial of strength between two enemies whose weapons are so much alike? If either got the better it would be he who wielded these weapons with the greater address; the author of the *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge* has lately given in his *Treatise on Systems* additional proof of his adroitness and skill and shown himself a redoubtable foe to the systematics.

We have wandered far from the blind, you will say. True, madam, but you must be so good as to allow me all these digressions; I promised you a conversation, and I cannot keep my word without this indulgence.

I have read as carefully as it was in my power what Saunderson has said on the infinite; and I assure you he had such very just and very clear notions on the subject that in his account most of our infinitarians would have been looked on but as blind. You yourself shall be judge: though this matter be somewhat difficult, and a little beyond your mathematical knowledge, I

trust to bring it within your grasp and initiate you into the logic of the infinite.

The case of this famous blind man proves that the sense of touch, when trained, can become more delicate than sight, for he distinguished genuine from counterfeit coins [Memoirs of the life and character of Dr Nicholas Saunderson in Saunderson's Algebra, vol. i, p. xi (1740)] by passing his hands over a number of these, although the counterfeits were sufficiently good imitations to deceive a clearsighted connoisseur; and he judged of the accuracy of a mathematical instrument by passing the tips of his fingers along its divisions. This is certainly more difficult than to judge by touch of the resemblance of a bust to the person represented, and this shows that a blind people might have sculptors and put statues to the same use as among us to perpetuate the memory of great deeds, and of persons dear to them; and in my opinion feeling such statues would give them a keener pleasure than we have in seeing them. What a delight to a passionate lover to draw his hand over beauties which he would know again, when illusion, which would act more potently on the blind than on those who see, should come to reanimate them! But perhaps, as he would take a deeper pleasure in the memory, his grief would be the keener for the loss of the original.

Saunderson, like the blind man of Puisaux, was affected by the smallest atmospheric change, and could recognise, especially in still weather, the presence of objects not far from him. It is related of him that being present during some astronomical observations taken in a garden, the clouds which hid the face of the sun every now and then from the spectators at the same time caused such a change in the action of the rays on his face as signified to him the moments which favoured or impeded the experiments. You may, perhaps, think that some change in the eye might indicate to him the presence of light, but not of distant objects, and I would have supposed so

myself, but for the fact that Saunderson had lost not only his sight but its organ.

Saunderson, then, saw by means of his skin, and this integument of his was so keenly sensitive that with a little practice he could certainly have recognised the features of a friend traced upon his hand, and would have exclaimed, as the result of successive sensations caused by the pencil: “That is so-and-so.” Thus the blind have likewise a painting, in which their own skin serves as the canvas. These are no wild fancies, and I am sure if the little mouth of M — were traced on your hand, you would immediately recognise it. Yet you must allow the blind man would find this an easier task than you, accustomed though you are to see and admire that mouth. For two or three elements enter into your recognition: the comparison of the tracery on your hand with the picture formed on the ground of your eye; the recollection of the manner in which we are affected by things felt, and of the manner with which we are affected by things we have only seen and admired; finally, the application of these data to the question of the draughtsman, who asks you when he draws with his pencil a mouth on the skin of your hand: “Whose mouth is this which I am drawing?” Whereas the sum of the sensations aroused by a mouth laid on the blind man’s hand is the same as the sum of the successive sensations caused by the draughtsman’s pencil.

I might add to this account of Saunderson and the blind man of Puisaux, Didymus of Alexandria, Eusebius the Asiatic, and Nicaise of Mechlin, and some other people who, though lacking one sense, seemed so far above the level of the rest of mankind that the poets might without exaggeration have feigned the jealous gods to have deprived them of it, from fear lest mortals should equal them. For what was Tiresias, who had penetrated the secrets of the gods, but a blind philosopher whose memory has been handed down to

us by fable? But let us return to Saunderson and follow the history of this extraordinary man to his grave.

When he was at the point of death, a clergyman of great ability, Mr Gervase Holmes, was summoned to his side, and they held a discussion upon the existence of God, some fragments of which are extant, and which I will translate to the best of my ability, for they are well worth it. The clergyman began by haranguing on the wonders of nature. “Ah, sir,” replied the blind philosopher, “don’t talk to me of this magnificent spectacle, which it has never been my lot to enjoy. I have been condemned to spend my life in darkness, and you cite wonders quite out of my understanding, and which are only evidence for you and for those who see as you do. If you want to make me believe in God you must make me touch Him.”

“Sir,” returned the clergyman, very appositely, “touch yourself, and you will recognise the Deity in the admirable mechanism of your organs.”

“Mr Holmes,” replied Saunderson, “I must repeat it, all that does not appear so admirable to me as to you. But even if the animal mechanism were as perfect as you maintain, and I dare say it is (for you are a worthy man and would scorn to impose on me), what relation is there between such mechanism and a supremely intelligent Being? If it fills you with astonishment, that is perhaps because you are accustomed to treat as miraculous everything which strikes you as beyond your own powers. I have been myself so often an object of admiration to you, that I have not a very high idea of your idea of the miraculous, I have had visits from people from all parts of England who could not conceive how I could work at geometry: you must allow such folk not to have been very exact in their notions of the possibility of things. We think a certain phenomenon beyond human power and we cry out at once: ‘’Tis the handiwork of a god; our vanity will stick at nothing less. Why can we not season our talk with a little less pride and a little more philosophy? If nature offers us a knotty problem,

let us leave it for what it is, without calling in to cut it the hand of a being who immediately becomes a fresh knot and harder to untie than the first. Ask an Indian how the earth hangs suspended in mid-air, and he will tell you that it is carried on the back of an elephant; and what carries the elephant? A tortoise. And the tortoise? You pity the Indian, and one might say to yourself as to him: 'My good friend Mr Holmes, confess your ignorance, and drop the elephant and the tortoise.'"

Saunderson paused, apparently waiting for a reply, but what possible reply was there to the blind man? Mr Holmes availed himself of his good opinion of his probity and of the abilities of Newton, Leibniz, Clarke, and some of his fellow-countrymen, men of the highest genius, who had all been impressed by the wonders of nature and recognised an intelligent being as its creator. This was certainly the clergyman's strongest argument. The blind man admitted that it would be presumptuous to deny what such a man as Newton had acquiesced in; yet he represented to the clergyman that Newton's evidence was not of that weight to him, as that of all nature to Newton; while Newton believed on God's word, he was reduced to believe on Newton's word.

"Consider, Mr Holmes," he added, "what a confidence I must have in your word and in Newton's. Though I see nothing, I admit there is in everything an admirable design and order. I hope you will not demand more. I take your word for the present state of the universe, and in return keep the liberty of thinking as I please on its ancient and primitive state, with relation to which you are as blind as myself. Here you will have no witnesses to confront me with, and your eyes are quite useless. Think, if you choose, that the design which strikes you so powerfully has always subsisted, but allow me my own contrary opinion, and allow me to believe that if we went back to the origin of things and scenes and perceived matter in motion and the evolution from chaos, we should meet with a number of

shapeless creatures, instead of a few creatures highly organised. I make no criticism on the present state of things, but I can ask you some questions as to the past. For instance, I may ask you and Leibniz and Clarke and Newton, who told you that in the first instances of the formation of animals some were not headless and others footless? I might affirm that such an one had no stomach, another no intestines, that some which seemed to deserve a long duration from their possession of a stomach, palate, and teeth came to an end owing to some defect in the heart or lungs; that monsters mutually destroyed one another; that all the defective combinations of matter disappeared, and that those only survived whose mechanism was not defective in any important particular and who were able to support and perpetuate themselves.

"Suppose the first man had his larynx closed, or had lacked suitable food, or had been defective in the organs of generation, or had failed to find a mate, or had propagated in another species, what then, Mr Holmes, would have been the fate of the human race? It would have been still merged in the general depuration of the universe, and that proud being who calls himself man, dissolved and dispersed among the molecules of matter, would have remained perhaps for ever hidden among the number of mere possibilities. If shapeless creatures had never existed, you would not fail to assert that none will ever appear, and that I am throwing myself headlong into chimerical fancies, but the order is not even now so perfect as to exclude the occasional appearance of monstrosities." Then, turning towards the clergyman, he added, "Look at me, Mr Holmes. I have no eyes. What have we done, you and I, to God, that one of us has this organ while the other has not?"

Saunderson uttered these words in such a sincere and heartfelt tone that the clergyman and the rest of the company could not remain insensible to his suffering, and began to weep bitterly. He noticed it and said to the

clergyman, “Mr Holmes, I was aware of the kindness of your heart, and I am very grateful for the expression of it you have given me just now; but if you love me, do not grudge me my dying consolation of never having caused anyone affliction.”

Then, continuing the conversation in a firmer tone, he added: “I conjecture, then, that in the beginning, when matter in a state of ferment brought this world into being, creatures like myself were of very common occurrence. But might not worlds too be in the same case? How many faulty and incomplete worlds have been dispersed and perhaps form again, and are dispersed at every instant in remote regions of space which I cannot touch nor you behold, but where motion continues and will continue to combine masses of matter, until they have found some arrangement in which they may finally persevere? O philosophers, travel with me to the confines of this universe, beyond the point where I feel and you behold organised beings; cast your eyes over this new ocean, and search in its aimless and lawless agitations for vestiges of that intelligent Being whose wisdom fills you with such wonder and admiration here!

“But what is the use of taking you out of your element? What is this world, Mr Holmes, but a complex, subject to cycles of change, all of which show a continual tendency to destruction; a rapid succession of beings that appear one by one, flourish and disappear; a merely transitory symmetry and momentary appearance of order? A moment ago I reproached you for estimating the perfection of things by your own capacity; I might accuse you here of measuring duration by your own existence. You judge of the phases of the world’s existence as the ephemeral insect of yours. The world seems to you eternal, just as you seem eternal to the creatures of a day; and the insect is more reasonable than you. What a prodigious series of ephemeral generations witness to *your* eternity, what an immense tradition! Yet we shall all pass away without a possibility of denoting the real extent

which we took up, or the precise time of our duration. Time, matter, and space are perhaps but a point,"

During this conversation Saunderson became more excited than his state of health would permit, and an attack of delirium ensued, which lasted several hours. At its close he cried, "O thou God of Clarke and Newton, have mercy on me!" and expired.

Such was the end of Saunderson. You see, madam, that all the arguments of the clergyman he took exception to were not of a character to convince a blind man. What a disgrace to men who have no better argument than he; men who have eyes, to whom the marvellous spectacle of nature from sunrise to the setting of the smallest stars reveals the existence and glory of its Maker! They have sight, which Saunderson was deprived of, but Saunderson was blessed with a purity of life and uprightness which we look for in vain in them. Accordingly they lead the life of the blind, and Saunderson died as if he knew the light. The voice of nature made itself clear to him by the media of the senses he possessed, and his evidence is the more convincing against those who obstinately shut their eyes and ears. Was not the true God more completely veiled by the mists of paganism for a Socrates, than for the blind Saunderson, who never enjoyed the spectacle of nature?

I am very sorry, madam, both for your sake and mine, that no further interesting particulars of this famous blind man have been handed down. His conversation would perhaps have afforded more light than all our experiments. Those about him must have been devoid of the philosophic spirit. I make an exception in favour of his pupil, Mr William Inchlif, who only saw Saunderson during his last moments, and who took down his last words, which I should advise all who know English to read in the original, printed in Dublin in 1747, and entitled *The Life and Character of Dr Nicholas Saunderson, late Lucasian Professor of the Mathematicks in the*

University of Cambridge; by his disciple and friend William Inchlif, Esq. They will find a charm, and a vigour in this, scarce ever paralleled, but which I do not flatter myself I have conveyed in translation, in spite of all my care.

He married in 1713 the daughter of Mr Dickons, rector of Boxworth, in the county of Cambridge, and had by her a son and daughter who are still living. His farewell to his family was exceedingly moving. “I go,” said he, “to our common destination; spare me laments which unman and unnerve. The expressions of grief which escape you only make me conscious of my own. I gladly give up a life which has been for me a long desire, a constant privation. Live on, as virtuous as I, but more fortunate, and learn to die with equal calm.” He then took his wife’s hand, which he held for a moment clasped in his own; he turned his face towards her as if he desired to see her; he blessed his children, embraced them, and begged them to leave him, because they caused him greater grief than the approach of death.

England is the land of philosophy and of scientific inquiry, yet without Mr Inchlif we should only know what the common man could have narrated of Saunderson; for instance, that he recognised places he had once visited by the sound the walls and pavement reflected, and many similar anecdotes, all equally common to the majority of the blind. Strange! Are blind men of such high intellectual abilities as Saunderson of common occurrence in England, and are men born blind who lecture on optics to be met with every day?

People try to give those born blind the gift of sight, but, rightly considered, science would be equally advanced by questioning a sensible blind man. We should learn to understand his psychology and should compare it with ours, and perhaps we should thereby come to a solution of the difficulties which make the theory of vision and of the senses so intricate and so confused. But I own I cannot conceive what information we

could expect from a man who had just undergone a painful operation upon a very delicate organ which is deranged by the smallest accident and which when sound is a very untrustworthy guide to those who have for a long time enjoyed its use. For my part, as to the theory of the senses, 1 would sooner hear a metaphysician who was acquainted with the principles of metaphysics, the elements of mathematics, and the conformation of the organs of sense, than an uneducated man whose sight was first due to an operation for cataract. I would have less confidence in the impressions of a person seeing for the first time than in the discoveries of a philosopher who had profoundly meditated on the subject in the dark; or, to adopt the language of the poets, who had put out his eyes in order to be the better acquainted with vision.

To obtain some certainty in such experiments the subject must at least have been prepared a long time beforehand; he should be made a philosopher — no rapid process even with a philosopher for teacher! And imagine the task if the teacher were not enlightened, or (worse still) fondly and mistakenly imagined himself enlightened! It would be better to postpone the investigation to a considerable period after the operation. To do this, the patient would have to remain in darkness, and the investigator would have to see to it that his wound was healed and his eyes perfectly sound. I would not expose him to full daylight for the first time. A strong light dazzles our eyes; what effect will it not have on an organ which cannot but be extremely tender and sensitive, and which has never yet felt any impression to blunt it?

But this is only the beginning. It would be a difficult and delicate task to reap any benefit even from a person thus prepared, and to adapt our questions so that he may precisely say only what passes in himself. This interrogatory should be held in presence of the Academy; or rather, to avoid

the presence of idle spectators, only such as deserve that distinction by their knowledge of philosophy, anatomy, etc., should be invited.

The task would not be beneath the intelligence of the best and wisest of men; to train and question one born blind would be an occupation worthy of the combined talents of Newton, Descartes, Locke and Leibniz.

I will end my letter, which I own is already too lengthy, by a problem which was propounded some time ago. Some reflections upon Saunderson's singular condition tend to show that it has never been absolutely solved. Suppose one blind from birth has been taught to distinguish by touch a cube and a sphere of the same metal and of approximately the same size, so that when he touches them he can say which is the cube and which is the sphere.

Suppose the cube and sphere placed on a table and the blind man suddenly to see; can he distinguish the cube from the sphere by sight without touch?

Mr Molyneux first stated this problem and attempted to solve it. He declared that the blind man would not distinguish between the cube and the sphere; "for," said he, "though he has learnt by experience the effect of a sphere and a cube upon the sense of touch, he does not yet know that what affects his sense of touch in such and such a manner must affect his sight thus or thus; nor that the projecting angle of the cube which presses against his hand should appear to his eyes as it actually does appear in the cube."

Locke, when consulted on this point, said: "I certainly agree with Mr Molyneux's opinion. I believe the blind man incapable at first sight of affirming with any certainty which was the cube and which the sphere if he merely looked at them, although, if he touched them, he could name them and distinguish between them by the difference of their shape, which he would recognise by touch."

The Abbé de Condillac, whose *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge* you have read with so much pleasure and profit, and whose

excellent *Treatise on Systems* accompanies this letter, makes an original contribution to the question. I shall not repeat his arguments here, since you will have the pleasure of reading his book in which they are expounded in such an entertaining and yet such a philosophical manner that it would be a mistake on my part to tear them from their context. I shall merely observe that they all tend to prove that the born-blind either sees nothing, or distinguishes between the sphere and the cube; and that the conditions that these two bodies should be of the same metal and of approximately the same size (which was postulated in the problem) are unnecessary, which cannot be disputed; for he might have said, if there be no essential connection between the sensations of the sight and the touch (as Messrs Locke and Molyneux assert), they must admit that a body may to the eye appear to have two feet in diameter which yet would vanish on being touched. De Condillac adds, however, that if the blind man sees bodies and distinguishes their forms, and yet hesitates what to think about them, it must be from metaphysical reasons, and those not a little subtle, which I shall presently explain. We have here two different opinions on the same question — a difference between philosophers of the highest rank. One would suppose, after the problem had been studied by men such as Messrs Molyneux, Locke and the Abbé de Condillac, that nothing more could be said; but the same thing can be viewed from so many different sides that it is not strange if they have not exhausted all its possibilities.

Those who declare that a man blind from birth could not distinguish between a cube and a sphere have set out by assuming a fact which perhaps should have been investigated; that is, whether a blind man who has had his cataracts removed is in a condition to use his eyes immediately after the operation. They merely say: “The blind man, comparing the ideas of spheres and cubes which he has received by the sense of touch with those received by sight, will necessarily know them to be the same; and it would

be indeed odd if he were to name that body a cube which gives the eye the idea of a sphere, and sphere that which gives the idea of a cube. He will therefore call those bodies spheres and cubes at sight which he called spheres and cubes by the sense of touch."

But how do their antagonists reply? They have also taken for granted that the blind man could see immediately his organ was perfect; they supposed that an eye couched for cataract was like an arm that ceases to be paralysed. As the latter does not need exercise before it feels, they said, neither does the former before it sees; and they added: "Let us grant the blind man a little more philosophy than you afford him, and after carrying on the reasoning where you left it, he will continue thus: 'But still, who is to assure me that when I approach these bodies and touch them with my hands they will not on a sudden deceive my expectation, and that a cube will not give me the sensation of a sphere and a sphere of a cube? Experience alone can teach me whether there be an analogy between sight and touch. The reports of these two senses may well be contradictory without my knowing it; nay, I should perhaps suppose what is actually present to the sight to be only a mere appearance, had I not been informed that they are the very same bodies I had touched. This object certainly seems to be the body which I called a cube; and that, the body I called a sphere; but the question is, not what I *think*, but what *is*; and I am not in a position to answer the latter question satisfactorily.'"

The line of argument, says the author of the *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge,* would be extremely perplexing to him who had been born blind, and I see nothing but experience which can furnish an answer to it. It seems probable that the Abbé de Condillac means only the experiment repeated by the blind man himself on a second handling of these bodies. You will soon perceive why I make this point. That able metaphysician might have added that the blind man would be the more inclined to suppose

that two senses might be mutually contradictory, as he conceives that a mirror makes them mutually contradictory, as I have noticed already.

De Condillac proceeds to observe that Molyneux has confused the issues of the problem by laying down several conditions which are irrelevant to the metaphysical difficulties which the blind man would experience. This criticism is the more just, as the supposition of the blind man being acquainted with metaphysics is not at all out of the way; because the experiment in all such philosophical questions should be accounted to be made on a philosopher — that is to say, on a person who perceives in the questions propounded all that his reason and the state of his organs permit him to perceive. Such, briefly, are, madam, the pros and cons of the problem; and you shall now see by my examination of it how very far they, who asserted that the blind man would see geometrical figures and distinguish between them, were from realising that they were right; and what good reason their opponents had to think that they were not in the wrong.

This problem of the blind man, stated in somewhat more general terms than by Molyneux, embraces two problems which we will consider separately. We may ask (1) if the blind man would see immediately after the operation for cataract; (2) supposing he is able to see, could he see well enough to distinguish between figures; could he, in seeing them, correctly give them the same names which he gave them by the sense of touch; and if he can, prove that these names are the right ones?

Will the man born blind see immediately after the cure of the organ? Those who maintain that he will not see, say: “Directly the blind man is able to use his eyes, all the scene before him is represented at the back of the eye. This image, which is composed of a number of objects concentrated in a very small space, is but a confused mass of figures which he will not be able to distinguish. People are on the whole agreed that it is

only experience which can enable him to judge of the distance of objects, and that he is obliged to approach, touch, draw back from, and again approach and touch them to assure himself that they are not part of himself and are foreign to his essence; that he is now near and now far from them. Why should not experience be a necessary preliminary for perceiving them? Without previous experience he who perceives objects for the first time would suppose, when he is out of sight of them, that they had ceased to exist; for it is only our experience of permanent objects and such as we find again in the same place where we left them which evidences the continuity of their existence when out of our sight. It is perhaps for this reason that children are so readily consoled for toys taken from them. It cannot be said that they promptly forget them, for some children only two and a half years old know a considerable number of words of a language and are more at a loss to pronounce them than to retain them. Now, this is a proof of childhood's being the very season of memory.

Is it not a more likely hypothesis that children think that what they no longer see no longer exists, especially as their joy when things they have lost sight of appear again is mixed with surprise? Nurses help them to acquire the notion of the continuance of absent persons by playing a game which consists in hiding the face, and showing it again. Thus they learn a hundred times in a quarter of an hour that what ceases to appear does not necessarily cease to exist. Whence it follows that we owe the notion of the continuous existence of objects to experience, of their distance to the sense of touch; that the eye may perhaps have to learn to see as the tongue to speak; that it would not be surprising should the aid of one of the senses be necessary to another; and that touch, which ascertains the existence of objects exterior to ourselves when present to our eyes, is likewise the sense to which the confirmation not only of their figures, and other details of these objects, but even their presence, is reserved.

To these arguments may be added the famous experiment of Cheselden. The young man from whose eyes this skilful surgeon removed cataracts was for a long time unable to distinguish dimensions, distances, positions, or even figures. An object an inch in size held before his eye so as to hide a house from him appeared as large as the house itself. All he saw seemed as close to his eye as the object he touched to the skin. He could not distinguish what he judged round by touch from what he had judged angular; nor distinguish by sight whether what he had felt to be above or beneath him were in reality above or beneath him. He eventually succeeded, but not without difficulty, in perceiving that his house was larger than his room, but he could not conceive how this could be ascertained by sight. Repeated experiments were necessary before he became assured of paintings representing solid bodies and when he was quite convinced by looking at pictures that what he saw was not bare surfaces, on putting his hand to a picture he was vastly surprised at finding a plane surface without any relief. Me then asked which was deceptive, the sense of touch or the sense of sight? Painting likewise has the same effect on savages. They take the painted figures for living men, question them and are astonished at receiving no answer; and this error in them certainly did not proceed from their not being accustomed to see.

But what can be answered to the other difficulties? That the trained and practised eye of a man sees better than the weak and untrained organ of an infant, or of one born blind who has had his eyes couched. Look, madam, at the proofs adduced by the Abbé de Condillac at the end of his *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge*, where he also adduces Cheselden's experiments as related by Voltaire. The effects of light upon an eye for the first time so affected, and the conditions required in humours of that organ, the cornea, the crystalline lens, etc., are clearly and ably specified therein, and leave little doubt that the vision of an infant opening its eyes for the

first time, or a blind person who has just been operated upon, is very imperfect.

We must, therefore, admit we perceive a multitude of details in objects unperceived by the infant or one born blind, though these objects are equally represented at the back of their eyes; for objects to strike us is not enough — we must further attend to these experiences; that, consequently, we see nothing the first time we use our eyes; and during the first moments of sight we only receive a mass of confused sensations, which are only disentangled after a time and by a process of reflection. It is by experience alone that we learn to compare our sensations with what occasions them; that sensations having no essential resemblance with their objects, it is from experience that we are to inform ourselves concerning analogies which seem to be merely positive. In short, that touch is of great service in giving the eye an accurate knowledge of the conformity of the object to the sense-impression received of it is unquestionable; and I am much inclined to think that were not everything in nature subject to laws infinitely general — if, for instance, the pricking of certain hard bodies were painful, and that of certain other bodies pleasurable — we should die before we had received the hundred-millionth fraction of the experiences necessary for the preservation of our body and our well-being.

I am not, however, of opinion that the eye is incapable of learning, or, if I may say so, of experimenting alone. To ascertain the existence and form of objects by touch, there is no necessity of seeing; why should touch be necessary for complete realisation of the same objects by sight? I am awake to all the advantages of touch; I have not disguised them in these observations on Saunderson or the blind man of Puisaux; but I cannot allow it that prerogative. It is easy to see that the use of one sense may be perfected and accelerated by the observations of another; but not that there is an essential interdependence between their functions. There exist

certainly properties in bodies which we should never perceive without touch; and by touch we learn the presence of certain details invisible to the eye, which only becomes aware of these when informed by the sense of touch; but their services are mutual; and in the case of persons who have sight more highly developed than touch it is the former which warns the latter of the existence of objects and of details which would pass unnoticed from their minuteness. If unknown to you a piece of paper or some smooth, thin, and flexible substance were placed between your thumb and index finger, it is your eye alone which would inform you that the contact between your two fingers was not direct.

It would be much more difficult, I may cursorily add, to deceive a blind man than a person used to see in this.

An eye which is in sound condition and freely exercised might have some difficulty in convincing itself that exterior objects are not part of itself; that some things are distant, some near; that they have forms; that some are larger than others; that they have depth, etc.; still, I make no doubt that at length it would come to see them, and to see them so distinctly as to distinguish at least their more obvious limits.

To deny this would be to set aside the aim and object of the organs; it would be forgetting the chief phenomena of vision; it would be concealing from oneself that there is no painter of such skill as to rival the beauty and exactness of the miniatures which are painted in the back of your eyes; that there is nothing more exact than the likeness of the representation to the object itself; that the canvas of this picture is not so very small, that there is no confusion among the various forms, and that they occupy about a square half-inch; and that nothing is more difficult to explain than how the sense of touch would begin to teach the eye to see were the use of the latter organ absolutely impossible without the aid of the former.

But, instead of bare presumptions, I ask you whether it is touch that teaches the eye to distinguish colours? I do not suppose such an extraordinary claim will be made for touch; and this being so, it follows that if a blind man who has just been given the gift of sight is shown a black cube or a red sphere on a white background, he will immediately discern the several outlines of these figures.

Delay will be caused, some may object, by the time which must elapse for the humours of the eye to assume their proper dispositions, for the cornea to assume the convexity requisite for vision, for the pupil to be susceptible of the dilation and contraction proper to it, for the filaments of the retina to be sensitive in the right degree to the action of light, for the crystalline to exercise its forward and backward movement or for the muscles to fulfil their functions well, for the optic nerves to become accustomed to the transmission of sensation, for the entire eyeball to accommodate itself to all the necessary dispositions, and for all its component parts to combine in the execution of that miniature, which so much illustrates the demonstration that the eye will bring itself to the requisite experience.

I own that, plain as the picture is which I have now represented to the eye of one born blind, he will not be able clearly to distinguish its parts until all these above conditions are combined; but that is perhaps the work of a moment; and it would not be difficult, by applying the aforesaid argument to a complicated mechanism such as a watch, to prove by enumerating all the movements which take place in the drum, the fusee, the wheels, the pallets, the pendulum, etc., that the hand would take a fortnight in moving the space of a second. If it is objected that these movements are simultaneous, I reply that so perhaps are the movements in the eye when it opens for the first time, and most of the consecutive judgments. Whatever are the conditions in the eye requisite for vision, it must be granted that it is

not touch which imparts them to it, that the organ acquires them independently; consequently, will succeed in distinguishing the figures represented therein without the aid of another sense.

But when does this occur?, some will say. Perhaps far sooner than is thought. When we went together to the Jardin Royal, do you remember the experiment with the concave mirror and your fright when you saw the point of a sword making at you with the same swiftness as the point of that which you pushed towards the surface of the mirror? And yet you were sufficiently accustomed to refer objects represented in mirrors to something beyond them. Experience, therefore, is not so very necessary, nor so infallible as imagined, for perceiving objects or their images where they are. Your very parrot gives proof of it. The first time he saw himself in a mirror, he touched it with his beak, and as he did not reach himself (whom he took for a fellow-parrot) he walked round the mirror.

I am not for laying more than due weight on the instance of the parrot; still, it is an experiment with an animal in which preconceived notions cannot be supposed to have any share.

Yet if I were told that a man born blind saw nothing for the space of two months, I should not be surprised. I shall only conclude from it the necessity of the organs becoming practised, not the necessity of touch. It will be another reason why it is important to let such a person remain for some time in the dark, when he is to be the subject of experiment; to allow him the opportunity of exercising his eye, which will be done more conveniently in the dark than in full daylight; and only to permit a kind of twilight during the experiments, or at least to arrange for the increasing or diminishing of light at pleasure in the spot where the experiments take place. I shall only be the more inclined to agree that such experiments will always be very difficult and uncertain; and that the best and shortest (though superficially the longest) way would be to arm the subject with a

philosophical training sufficient to enable him to compare the two conditions he has known, and to acquaint us with the difference between the state of a blind person and of one who has his sight. Once more, what precision is to be expected from one who has not the habit of thought and analysis, and who, like Cheselden's blind man, is so ignorant of the benefits of sight as to be insensible to his misfortune, not conceiving that the lack of this sense very much impairs his pleasure? Saunderson, who certainly deserves the name of philosopher, was not thus indifferent, and I doubt much whether he would have agreed with the author of the excellent *Treatise on Systems;* I suspect the latter to have fallen into a "system" himself when he writes that, "had the life of man been only an uninterrupted sensation of pleasure or of pain, happy without prospect of pain, wretched without any prospect of pleasure, he would have rejoiced or suffered; and that if he were so constituted, he would not have looked about him to discover if some influence were well disposed towards him, or desired to injure him; it is only the alternation between these two conditions which causes him to reflect," etc.

Can you believe, madam, that by a clear train of reasoning (for that is the author's method of philosophising) he would ever have been led to this conclusion? It is not with happiness and misery as with light and darkness; the one is not simply the privation of the other. We might, perhaps, have entertained the idea that happiness was as essential to us as existence and thought, had we enjoyed it without intermission; but I cannot say the same with regard to unhappiness. It would have been very natural to look on it as a forced condition, to feel oneself innocent, yet to believe oneself guilty and to accuse or excuse nature as at present.

Does the Abbé de Condillac suppose that a child in pain only cries from his pain not having been without intermission from his birth? If he replies that "existence and pain would be one and indivisible for one who had

always suffered, and that such an one could not imagine cessation of suffering without cessation of his existence," I make reply: "The man living in continual misery possibly might not have said, 'What have I done that I should suffer thus?' but why might he not have said, 'What have I done that I should be brought into being?'"

At the same time, I see no reason why he should not have used his two synonymous verbs, I *exist* and I *suffer*, the one in prose, the other in poetry, as we use the two expressions, I *live* and I *breathe*. Moreover, madam, you will observe better than I do that this passage of the Abbé de Condillac's is admirably fine, and I fear you may say, after comparing my criticism with his reflections, you prefer an error of Montaigne's to a truth of Charron's.

You may blame my continual digressions. But digressions are of the essence of this treatise. Now my opinion on the two foregoing questions is this: the first time the eyes of one born blind open to the light, he will see nothing at all; some time will be necessary for his eye to practise sight; it will practise alone and without the aid of touch, and will eventually distinguish not only colours but the main outlines of objects. Supposing he acquired this aptitude in a very short space of time, or acquired it by using his eyes in the dark apartment in which he had been confined and urged to use that exercise for some time after the operation and before the experiments; let us now see whether he would recognise at sight the bodies he had touched, so as to give them the proper appellations. This is the final question.

In order to treat the question in the manner you will appreciate — for you like method — I will classify the persons on whom the experiment might be made. If they are dullards without education and knowledge and also unprepared, I hold that when the operation for cataract has completely removed the defect of the eye and the eye is in a healthy state, objects would be very distinctly pictured in it; but such patients, being

unaccustomed to any kind of reasoning and not knowing anything of sensation or idea, would be unable to compare the sensations they had received by touch with those they now receive by sight, and would at once exclaim, “There is a round, there is a square,” so that their judgment is not to be relied on; or even they will possibly own that they saw nothing in the objects present to their sight like what they have handled.

Another class there is, who by comparing the forms they see with the bodies that had previously made an impression upon their hands, and mentally applying touch to distant objects, would describe one body as a square, and another as a circle without well knowing why, their comparison of the ideas they have acquired by sight not being sufficiently distinct in their minds to convince their judgment.

I pass to a third class of subject, a metaphysician. He, I make no doubt, would, directly he began to see objects clearly, reason as if he had seen these bodies all his life; and after comparing the ideas acquired by sight with those acquired by touch he would declare as confidently as you or I: “I am very much inclined to think that this is the body which I have always called a circle, and that again what I named a square, but will not assert it to be really so. What is to prevent their disappearance if I were to touch them? How am I to know whether the bodies I see are also meant to be touched? I do not know whether visible things are palpable; but were I assured of this, and did I take the word of those about me that what I see is really what I have touched, I should be no better off. These bodies may transform themselves in my hands and transmit on contact sensations quite different from those resulting from sight. “Gentlemen,” would he conclude, “this body appears to be the square, that the circle; but that they are the same to touch as to sight is what I have no knowledge of,”

If we take as our subject a geometrician instead of a metaphysician, he will likewise say of the two figures he has before his eyes, one is what he

used to call a square, the other what he used to call a circle: “For I see,” he would add, “that it is only in the former I could arrange my threads and insert my large-headed pins which denoted the angles of the square; and only in the latter figure I could place the threads I required to demonstrate the properties of a circle. Here is a circle, then, and here is a square. But,” he would have added with Locke, “ perhaps when I lay my hands on these figures they will change one into another, so that the same figure would serve me in demonstrating the properties of a circle to the blind and the properties of a square to the sighted. I might possibly see a square and at the same time feel a circle. No,” he would have continued, “I am wrong. Those to whom I demonstrated the properties of the circle and the square had not their hands on my abacus, and did not touch the threads which I had stretched to outline my figures, and yet they understood me; they therefore did not see a square when I felt a circle, otherwise we should have been at crosspurposes; I should have been outlining one figure and demonstrating the properties of another, I should have given them a straight line for the arc of a circle, and an arc for a straight line: but as they all understood me, all men see alike: what they saw as a square, I see as a square; what they saw as a circle, I see as a circle. So this is what I have always called a square and that is what I have always called a circle.” I have substituted a circle for a sphere and a square for a cube, because there is reason to think that we only judge of distances by experience; and of course he who uses his eyes for the first time sees only surfaces without knowing anything of projection, since a projection consists in certain points appearing nearer to us than others.

But even if the blind man were able in his first attempt to judge of the projection of solidity of bodies and distinguish not only a circle from a square but likewise a sphere from a cube, yet I do not therefore think that this will hold good with regard to the case of more composite bodies. There

is reason to suppose that Monsieur de Réaumur's blind woman distinguished between colours, but the odds are thirty to one that what she said of the sphere and the cube was purely guesswork. I am firmly persuaded that it was not possible for her (without inspiration) to recognise her gloves, her dressing-gown, and her shoes. These objects are so composite and full of detail; there is so little resemblance between their total shape and that of the limbs they are designed to adorn or cover that Saunderson would have been infinitely more perplexed to find out the use of his mortar-board than d'Alembert or Clairaut to discover the use of his tables.

Saunderson would infallibly have supposed a geometrical relation between the object and its use, hence he would have recognised that his skull-cap was made for his head, for this had no arbitrary form to confuse him. But what would he have thought of the points and tassel of his mortarboard? What was the use of the tassel, or why four points rather than six? And these two ornamental peculiarities would for him have been the source of a number of absurd theories, or rather an excellent satire upon what we call good taste.

Taking everything into mature consideration, it will be admitted that the difference between a person who has always seen, but to whom the use of an object is unknown, and one who knows the use of an object, but has never seen, is not to the latter's advantage. Yet, do you think, madam, if you were shown a head-dress to-day for the first time, you would ever guess it to be an ornament, and particularly intended for the head? But if it be more difficult for one born blind and seeing for the first time to form a correct idea of complex objects, what is there to prevent him taking a person dressed and sitting motionless in an armchair for a machine or a piece of furniture, and a tree with its leaves and branches tossed by the wind for a self-moving, animated, and thinking being? How much our senses suggest

to us; and were it not for our eyes how apt should we be to suppose that a block of marble thinks and feels!

It is certain, therefore, that Saunderson would have been assured of his not being mistaken in the judgment he had just given of the circle and the square, and that there are cases when the reasoning and experience of others are of value in elucidating the relation of sight to touch, and in teaching that what a thing is to the eye, it is likewise to touch.

It would, however, be not the less essential in demonstrating some proposition of universal application (as it is termed) to test the proof by depriving it of the evidence of the senses; for you are very well aware, madam, that if some person attempted to prove to you that two parallel lines seen in perspective are to be represented in a picture by two converging lines, because the two sides of an avenue appear to converge, it would be forgetting that the proposition is as true for one that is blind as for himself. But the foregoing supposition of one born blind suggests two others: firstly, of a man who had always seen, but was devoid of the sense of touch; secondly, of a man in whom the senses of sight and touch were mutually contradictory. We might ask the former whether, if the missing sense were given him, or sight were obscured by a bandage, he would recognise bodies by touch. It is clear that geometry (provided he were acquainted with that science) would be an infallible guide as to whether the evidence of the two senses were contradictory or no. All he would have to do would be to take the cube or sphere in his hand, and demonstrate its properties, and pronounce that what he feels a cube is a cube to the eye; hence it is a cube he holds. As to one who is ignorant of this science, I believe he would not more easily distinguish a cube from a sphere by touch than Molyneux' blind man distinguished them by sight.

In the case of a man in whom the sensations of sight and touch are in a perpetual contradiction, I do not know what he would think of shapes,

order, symmetry, beauty, ugliness, etc. In all probability he would be with regard to those things as we are with regard to the real extension and real duration of beings. He would, in general, say that a body possesses a shape, but he must be inclined to think that it is neither that which he sees nor that which he feels. Such an one might be dissatisfied with his senses, but his senses would be neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the objects. Were he inclined to charge one sense with inaccuracy, I imagine it would be touch. A hundred circumstances would incline him to think that the form of objects changes rather by the action of his hands upon them than by that of the objects on his eyes. But in consequence of these preconceived notions, the difference between hardness and softness which he would find in bodies would be very perplexing to him.

But does it follow that figures are better known to us because our senses are not self-contradictory? Who has told us that they are not false witnesses? Yet we pass judgment. Alas! madam, when we weigh our human knowledge in Montaigne's scale, we are almost reduced to adopting his motto. For what do we know? What of the nature of matter? Nothing. What of the nature of spirit and thought? Still less. What of the nature of movement, space and duration? Absolutely nothing. What of the truths of geometry? Ask any honest mathematicians, and they will own to you that all their propositions are identical, and that so many volumes upon the circle (for example) are nothing but repetitions by a hundred different methods that it is a figure where all the lines drawn from the centre to the circumference are equal. Thus we scarce know anything, yet what numbers of books there are whose authors have all pretended to knowledge! I cannot think why the world is not tired of reading so much and learning nothing, unless it be for the very same reason that I have been talking to you for two hours, without being tired and without telling you anything.

With profound respect, I am, madam, Your very humble and obedient servant.

ADDITION TO THE PRECEDING LETTER



I AM GOING to jot down, anyhow, on paper, certain phenomena of which I was then ignorant, and which will serve as proofs or refutations of certain paragraphs in my *Letter on the Blind*. I wrote the latter thirty-three or thirty-four years ago, and I have reread it without partiality, and am not entirely dissatisfied with it. Although the first portion seemed to me more interesting than the second, and I felt that the former could have been further extended, the latter much abbreviated, I left both as I had written them, for fear that the young man's work might suffer by the old man's retouching. I think I should find it impossible to-day to emulate all that passes muster in ideas and in expression; and I fear I am equally unable to correct what merits criticism. A famous contemporary painter spends the evening of his life in spoiling the master-pieces produced in his maturity. I know not if the defects he finds in them are real; but either he never possessed the talent to improve them if he carried the imitation of nature to the extreme limits of art; or, if he possessed it, he has lost it, for all human qualities perish as a man decays. There comes a time when taste gives counsels which are recognised as just, but which we are unable to follow.

It is the weakness of spirit arising from the knowledge of weakness, or laziness which is one of the results of weakness and want of spirit, which stands in the way of a labour which would detract from the value of my work rather than improve it:

Solve senescentem mature sanus equum, ne peccet ad extremum ridendus, et ilia ducat, Horace, Epistolary lib. i, epist. i, v. S, 9.

Phenomena

I. An artist who is both an enlightened student of the theory of his art, and unequalled in its practice, has assured me that it was by touch and not by sight that he judged of the soundness of kernels; and that he rolled them gently between his thumb and first finger, and so discovered by successive impressions small inequalities of surface which were invisible to his eye.

II. I have heard of a blind man who recognised by touch the colour of stuffs.

III. I could name one who arranges the colours of bouquets with the taste upon which Jean Jacques

Rousseau prided himself when, whether in jest or earnest, he confided to his friends his scheme for setting up a school to teach the flower-sellers of Paris.

IV. At Amiens there was a blind dresser who presided over numerous workmen as well as if he had the gift of sight.

V. In the case of one sighted man the use of his eyes destroyed his certainty of touch; and in order to cut his hair, he removed the mirror and placed himself before a bare wall. The blind man who does not see a danger that threatens him is the more courageous, and I am sure he would walk with firmer step over the narrow and elastic planks bridging a precipice. There are very few who are undismayed by the sight of abysses beneath them.

VI. Everyone has heard of the famous surgeon Daviel. I was often present during his operations. He removed a cataract from the eyes of a blacksmith who had contracted this disease from exposure to the fire of his forge; and during twenty-five years of blindness he had grown so accustomed to the guidance of touch that he had to be forced to use the sense which had been restored to him. Daviel would beat him and say, “Use your eyes, you wretch!” He walked and moved, and did all that we do with our eyes open, with his eyes shut.

We are drawn to the conclusion that the eye is not so necessary nor so essential to our happiness as we are inclined to believe. If the spectacle of nature had no charms for the blind smith Daviel operated on, what object is there to the loss of which we should be otherwise than indifferent, after long deprivation of sight accompanied by no pain? The sight of a beloved woman? I don't believe it, in spite of the story I am going to relate. We imagine that if one had passed a long time without seeing, one would never be weary of looking; but that is not the case. What a contrast between momentary and constant blindness!

VII. Poor patients seeking Daviel's help were drawn to his laboratory from all the provinces of the kingdom by his charity, and his reputation also gathered there a large body of interested and learned spectators. I believe Marmontel and I were present on the same day. The patient was seated and his cataract removed; Daviel laid his hand upon the eyes which he had just restored to the light. An old woman, standing beside him, showed the liveliest interest in the success of the operation; she shook in every limb at each movement of the operator. The latter signed to her to draw near, placed her kneeling opposite the patient, and removed his hands. The patient opened his eyes, saw, and cried: " Oh, it is my mother!" I have never heard a more piteous cry; I seem to hear it still. The old woman fainted, the spectators wept, and gave their money freely.

VIII. The most astonishing case of all those who have lost their sight almost from their infancy was Mademoiselle Melanie de Salignac, a relative of Monsieur de la Fargue, a lieutenant-general in the army, who recently died at the age of ninety-one, covered with wounds and honours. She was the daughter of Madame de Blacy, who is still living, and who never ceases to regret a child who was the delight of her life and the admiration of all her acquaintances. Madame de Blacy is a woman of high character, who is willing to confirm the truth of my account. I write from her dictation such

particulars of the life of Mademoiselle de Salignac as did not come under my personal observation during a friendship which began with her and her family in 1760, and which lasted until 1763, the year of her death.

She had a sound judgment and great sweetness of disposition and subtlety of mind, as well as naïveté and freshness. When an aunt asked her mother to help her entertain nineteen bores at dinner, she replied, “I do not understand my dear aunt: why be kind to nineteen bores? I only wish to be kind to those I love.”

The sound of voices had the same attraction or antipathy for her as facial expression for those who see. A relation of hers, a receiver-general of finance, unexpectedly behaved badly to her family, and she said with astonishment: “Who would have believed it of such a charming voice?” When she heard singers, she distinguished between *dark* and *fair* voices.

When people spoke to her, she judged of their height by the direction of the sound, which came to her from above if the person speaking were tall, and from below if that person was short.

She was not anxious to see, and one day I asked her the reason. “The reason,” she replied, “is that then I should only have my own eyes, whereas now I have the use of everybody’s; by this loss I am always an object of interest and pity, at every instant people do me kindnesses, and at every instant I am grateful. Alas! if I could see, no one would trouble about me.”

The errors to which sight is liable diminished *its* value in her eyes. “I stand,” she said, “at the entrance of a long alley; and there is a certain object at its far end. One of my friends sees it moving, another sees it stationary; one says it is an animal, another that it is a man; and on approaching it, it turns out a tree-stump. No one can tell if the tower they see in the distance is round or square. I brave a whirlwind of dust, while those about me close their eyes and become ill — sometimes for a whole day — because they had not shut their eyes soon enough. An imperceptible atom is enough to

cause them cruel pain." At the approach of night she used to say that "our reign was drawing to a close, while hers was beginning." Living in the dark, and accustomed to act and think during this eternal night, insomnia, which is such a burden to us, had no terrors for her.

She would not forgive me for my statement that the blind, to whom the symptoms of suffering are invisible, must be cruel. " Do you imagine," said she, " that you hear a cry of pain as I do? "— "There are people," said I, " who suffer in silence."

"I believe," she said, "that I should soon discover them and pity them all the more."

She was devoted to reading and passionately fond of music. "I think," said she, "I should never tire of hearing good singing or playing; and if this were the only pleasure in heaven, I should not be sorry to go there. You are right in maintaining that music is the most impassioned of the fine arts, not excepting poetry and oratory; that even Racine does not express himself as subtly as a harp, that his music is heavy and monotonous when compared with an instrument, and that you have often wished to give your style the strength and lightness of Bach's music. Music is the most beautiful language I know. In spoken language, the better we pronounce words, the more particularly we articulate each syllable; whereas in the language of music, sounds of the most widely different pitch from bass to treble and treble to bass follow one another imperceptibly, forming one single prolonged syllable, which varies its inflexion and expression at every moment. While this syllable is brought to my ear by the melody, the harmony carries it out, without any confusion, upon a number of instruments — two, three, four, or five perhaps — which all combine to strengthen the expression of the melody. I can understand the music without the words sung, if the symphonist is a man of genius whose music is full of

character and expression. Music is most delicious and expressive in the silence of night.

“I fancy that people who see, distracted by their eyes, cannot listen and hear as I can. Why does the praise of music I hear seem poor and faint? Why can I never speak of it as I feel? Why do I pause in the midst of what I am saying, seeking vainly for words expressive of what I feel? Are such words not invented? I know nothing comparable to the effect of music but the joy I feel when, after a long absence, I throw myself into my mother’s arms; my limbs tremble, my tears flow, and my knees totter, and I feel as if I should die of joy.”

She had the most delicate feelings of modesty; and when I asked her reason, she replied: “ It is the result of my mother’s teaching, who has so often told me that the sight of certain parts of the body is an invitation to vice. I confess I have only understood her lately, and perhaps I had to become less innocent to do so.” She died of an internal tumour of which she never had the courage to inform anyone.

She was extremely neat and clean in her clothes and person, and this is the more remarkable as she had not eyesight to assure her that she had been successful in avoiding the vice of uncleanness and untidiness.

When her glass was being filled, she knew by the sound of the liquid as it fell, when it was full. She fed herself with surprising dexterity. Sometimes she amused herself by standing before a mirror to dress herself, and by imitating all the affectations of a coquette. The mimicry was so true to life that we laughed aloud.

From her earliest youth efforts had been made to train her other senses, and the results were astonishing. Touch enabled her to discern minute details in shapes of objects which often pass unnoticed by those who have the best eyesight.

She had very delicate senses of hearing and smell; she knew by the feeling of the air whether the weather was cloudy or fine, whether she was walking in a square or a road, in a road or a cul-de-sac, in an enclosed or open place, in a vast apartment or a small room. She measured the space by the sound of footsteps or the echo of voices. When she had gone over a house, its plan remained in her head, so that she would warn others of little obstacles or dangers in their way. “Take care,” she would say, “ the doorway here is low; you will find a step there.”

She noticed a variety in voices which we have no conception of, and when she had heard a person speak once or twice she knew him for ever.

She was very little affected by the charms of youth and by the wrinkles of age; and said she was only charmed by the fine qualities of the heart and intellect — one of the advantages of the loss of sight, especially for women. “My head will never,” she said, “ be turned by a handsome face.”

She had a very trusting disposition. It was so easy, and would have been so shameful, to deceive her. To lead her to imagine she was alone in a room, when this was not so, would have been the blackest of treacheries.

She was never subject to panic, and rarely to ennui; for she had learnt in her solitude to be independent of others. She noticed that at nightfall in travelling in public vehicles people became silent. “I do not need,” she said, “to see those whom I love to converse with.” She set the greatest value upon sound judgment, sweetness of disposition, and gaiety. She spoke little, and was an excellent listener. “I am like the birds,” she said: “I learn to sing in the dark.”

When she compared what she heard from day to day, she was astonished at the contradictory nature of our opinions; praise or blame seemed to her a matter of indifference from such inconsistent creatures as human beings.

She had been taught to read by cut-out letters. She had a pleasant voice, and sang with taste, and would have gladly spent her life at concerts or

operas; the only music she did not care for was noisy music. She danced exquisitely, and also played the viol very well, and owing to this talent she was greatly in demand among young persons of her age, to whom she taught the fashionable dances.

She was the best beloved of her brothers and sisters. “You see,” she said, “what I owe to my infirmities; people become attached to me as a result of their kindness to me, and of my efforts to show my gratitude and deserve their good offices. Besides, my brothers and sisters are not jealous. If I had sight, my heart and intellect would be the losers. I have so many inducements to be good! What would become of me if I were to lose the interest that I inspire?”

In her parents’ loss of fortune, the only thing she regretted was the loss of her masters; but they had so much liking and esteem for her that her music and mathematical masters begged her to let them teach her for nothing. She asked her mother: “Mother, what am I to do? They are not rich, and need all their time.”

She had been taught music by notes in relief placed on raised lines on a large board. She read these notes with her hand, and played them on her instrument, and in a very short time she learnt to play the longest and most elaborate piece.

She knew the elements of astronomy, algebra, and geometry. Her mother, who read her Abbé de la Caille’s book, would now and again ask her if she understood it. “Quite easily,” she would reply.

She declared that geometry was the science of the blind, because it was of such universal application and no external aid was necessary to become proficient in it. “The geometrician,” she added, “spends nearly all his life with his eyes shut.”

I have seen the maps with which she studied geography. The parallels and meridians were made of wire; the boundaries of kingdoms and

provinces of embroidery in linen, silk, or wool of various thickness; the rivers and streams and mountains of pins' heads of various sizes; and cities and towns of drops of wax of various sizes.

One day I said to her, "Mademoiselle, imagine a cube."

"I see it."

"Place a point in the centre of the cube."

"I have done so."

"From the point draw straight lines to the angles; into what have you divided the cube?"

"Into six pyramids," she replied without hesitation, "each having as its base one side of the cube, and a height equal to half its height."

"True, but tell me where you see this?"

"In my head, as you do."

I must admit I have never been able clearly to understand how she represented figures in her head without the aid of colour. Was her cube formed from memories of sensations of touch? Had her brain become, as it were, a hand within which substances were realised? Had a connection between two senses been established? Why does this connection not exist in my case, and why do I picture nothing that is not coloured in my mind's eye? What is the imagination of a blind man? This phenomenon is by no means easy of explanation.

She wrote with a pen, with which she pricked a sheet of paper stretched on a frame divided by two parallel and movable slats, which only left sufficient space between them for one line of writing. The same method of writing served to answer her, as she read the communication by passing her finger-tips over the slight roughness formed on the back of the paper by the needle or pin.

She read books printed on one side of the paper only for her use by Prault. One of her letters was printed in the *Mercure*.

She took the trouble to copy out with her needle President Hénault's *Historical Synopsis*, and her mother, Madame de Blacy, gave me this curious document.

People will find it difficult to accept the following fact, though I and all her family, as well as twenty persons still alive, can vouch for it. Given a piece of poetry of twelve to fifteen lines, if she was told the first letter and the number of letters in each word, she could reconstruct the poem, however odd and far-fetched. I tried her with Collé's ambigouris. She sometimes lighted on a better word than the original. She threaded the finest needle rapidly by laying the thread or silk on the index finger of her left hand and drawing this with a fine point through the eye of the needle placed perpendicularly. She could make all sorts of small articles — edgings, bags of all kinds, some of drawn work, and of various patterns and colours; garters, bracelets, necklaces made of glass beads the size of letters arranged to form patterns. I am sure she would have made a good compositor, for the greater includes the less.

She played reversis, *médiateur*, and quadrille well. She sorted her cards herself, and recognised each by touch from minute peculiarities others could neither see nor feel. In reversis she had a special place for the ace (especially the ace of diamonds) and the knave of hearts. The only difference in playing with her was that the card played was named. If the knave of hearts was in danger, a smile passed over her face, which she could not restrain though she realised that it was indiscreet.

She was a fatalist, and believed that our efforts to escape our destiny only served to draw us thither. I do not know what she thought of religion; she kept her opinions to herself out of consideration for her mother, who was devout.

Lastly, I will give you her ideas upon handwriting, drawing, engraving, and painting, and they are, I think, very just, as I hope you will think after

reading the following conversation between us. She begins the dialogue: —

“If you trace on my hand with a point, a nose, a mouth, a man, a woman, or a tree, I should be sure to recognise them; and if the tracing was correct, I should hope to recognise the person whom you had drawn; my hand would become a sensitive mirror, but the difference in sensibility between this hand and the organ of sight is immense. I suppose the eye is a living canvas of infinite delicacy; the air strikes the object, and is reflected back from the object to the eye, which receives a multitude of impressions varying in accordance with the nature, the form, the colour of the object, and also’ perhaps with the properties of the air which I do not know, and of which you are equally ignorant; and the object is represented to you by the variety of these sensations.

“If the skin of my hand was as sensitive as your eye, I should see with my hand as you see with your eyes; and I sometimes imagine there are animals who have no eyes, but can nevertheless see.”

“And the mirror?”

“If any bodies are not mirrors, it is by some defect in their composition which destroys the reflection of the air. I think this is the more likely as gold, silver, iron, and copper, when polished, are able to reflect the air, while rough water and cracked ice lose this property. Variety in sensation (and hence in the property of reflecting air), in the materials you employ, distinguishes the writing from the drawing, the drawing from the engraving, the engraving from the picture. The writing, the drawing, the engraving, and the picture in one colour are all monochromes.”

“But if there is only one colour, we should only distinguish that colour.”

“It seems that the surface of the canvas, the depth of colour, and the way in which it is used, produce in the reflection of the air a corresponding variation to that of the objects. Don’t ask me any more, for that is all I know.”

“To try to teach you any more would be waste of time.”

I have not described in her case all I might have noticed if I had seen her oftener and questioned her skilfully. I give you my word of honour that all I have recorded is actual fact.

She died at the age of twenty-two. With a wonderful memory, and strength of mind as wonderful, what progress she would have made in science if she had had a longer life! Her mother read history to her, and this was a task pleasant and useful to both of them.

Letter on the Deaf and Dumb (1751)

Translated by Margaret Jourdain, 1916

Original French Title: 'Lettre sur les sourds et muets'

LETTER TO MONSIEUR —

20th Jan. 1751.

I AM sending, sir, to the author of *The Fine Arts reduced to a Single Principle*, the *Letter* revised, corrected, and augmented in accordance with the advice of my friends; but always with the same title.

I grant that this title is applicable equally to the large number of those who *speak without understanding* and the small number of those who *understand without speaking*, and to the very small number of those who *speak and understand*, and for whose use my letter is solely intended.

I admit that it is an imitation of another *Letter* which might be better; but I am tired of hunting for a better title. Whatever importance you attribute to the choice of a title, the title of my letter will remain unchanged.

I do not like quotations, and I like Greek quotations least of all; they give a learned air to a book, which is no longer fashionable. They frighten away readers, and if I was deciding from a publisher's standpoint I should leave out such scarecrows. But I am not a publisher, so please suffer the Greek quotations to remain where I have placed them. If you care less for a book being good, than that it should be read, I do not agree with you; what I care for is to make a good book, although it may risk being less read.

As to the number of subjects I touch upon moving from one to another, I would have you know, and tell others, that this is no fault in a letter where

one is allowed to converse freely, and where the last word of a phrase is a sufficient link to the next.

You may therefore print me, if that is all; but print me anonymously, if you please. I can always admit the authorship later. I know one to whom people would not attribute it, and another on whom it would be certainly fathered, if it possessed some eccentricity in its ideas, some share of imagination, style, some temerity of thought which I should be sorry to share, a fine display of mathematics, metaphysics, Italian and English; less Latin and Greek, and more music.

See that no errors creep into the text; a single mistake is enough to ruin all. You will find in Havercamp's fine edition of Lucretius in the last book the figure I want. Take out the child which half hides her, imagine a wound beneath the breast, and have it copied. My friend Monsieur de S. has undertaken to revise the proofs. His address is...

I am, etc.

LETTER ON THE DEAF AND DUMB FOR THE USE OF THOSE WHO HEAR AND SPEAK:

Which treats of the origin of inversions in language, of harmony of style, of sublimity of situation, and of some advantages which the French language has over most ancient and modern languages, also some thoughts on expression in the fine arts.

I HAD no intention, sir, to take credit for your researches, and you may claim what you please in this letter. If it happens that my ideas are similar to yours, I am like the ivy which mingles its foliage with the oak. I might have addressed my letter to the Abbé de Condillac, or to Monsieur du Marsais, who has also treated of inversions; but you just came to my mind, and I have made free with you, for I am persuaded that the public will not this time take a happy accident for a deliberate choice. My only fear is, that I

may waste your time and snatch from you those hours which you are doubtless devoting to philosophy, and which you owe to that study.

Now, in order to treat of inversions we must first consider how languages are formed. Objects that strike the senses are those that are first noticed, and those which unite various qualities which strike the senses are named first, *i.e.*. the different objects of which the world is composed. Then the various qualities are distinguished and named, and these form most of our adjectives. Afterwards, these sensible qualities being put aside, some common quality was observed in various objects, such as impenetrability, extension, colour, shape, etc., and from these abstract and general names were formed and nearly all substantives. Gradually men became accustomed to think that all these names represented real things; and the sensible qualities were regarded as simple accidents, and thus the adjective was thought to be subordinate to the substantive, although the substantive does not really exist and the adjective is everything. If you are asked to describe an object, you answer that it is a body with a surface, impenetrable, shaped, coloured, and movable. But subtract all these adjectives from your definition and what is left of that imaginary being you call a body? If you wished to arrange the terms of your definition in their natural order, you would say a coloured, shaped, extended, impenetrable, movable substance. It seems to me that a man seeing the object for the first time would be affected by the different qualities in this order of terms. The eye would be first struck by the shape, colour, and surface; touch would then discover its impenetrability, and eye and touch together would discover its mobility. There would, therefore, be no inversion in this definition, and there is an inversion in the definition in its first form. It follows, therefore, that if we wish to maintain that there is no inversion in the French language, or at least that it is much rarer than in the learned tongues, the utmost we can say is that our constructions in French are for the most part uniform; that the

substantive is always, or nearly always, placed before the adjective; and the verb between them. For if we consider the question on its own merits, and ask if the adjective should be placed before or after the noun, it will appear that we frequently reverse the natural order of ideas. The example I have just given is an instance of this. I say the *natural* order of ideas; for we should distinguish here between the natural order and the *acquired*, or what we may term the *scientific* order; the latter is a deliberate arrangement after a language is fully formed.

As adjectives usually represent sensible qualities, they stand first in the natural order of ideas; but to a philosopher, or rather to philosophers who are accustomed to regard abstract substantives as realities, substantives will come first in the scientific order, being, in their language, the support which upholds the adjective. Thus of the two definitions of a, body I gave, the first follows the scientific or acquired, the second the natural order.

From this we may conclude that it is perhaps owing to the peripatetic philosophy, which realised all general and abstract entities, that we have in our language hardly any of what we call inversions in the classics. Our Gallic authors had much more than we have, and this philosophy was in the ascendant while our language was being perfected under Louis XIII and Louis XIV. The Ancients, who generalised less, and who studied nature more in detail, were less monotonous in the order of their tongue, and the word inversion would have perhaps astonished them. You will not raise as an objection here, that the peripatetic philosophy is Aristotle’s philosophy, and hence the philosophy of some portion of the Ancients, for you doubtless tell your disciples that our peripatetic philosophy is very different from Aristotle’s.

But it is, perhaps, unnecessary to go back as far as the creation of the world and the origin of language to explain why inversions crept into and were preserved in languages. It would be sufficient to make an imaginary

journey to a people whose language one was unacquainted with; or, what comes to almost the same thing, to experiment with a man who would forgo the use of articulate sounds and try to make himself understood by gestures alone. Such a man, who would perfectly understand the questions put to him, would be an excellent subject for experiment; and from the succession of his gestures definite inferences could be drawn as to the order of ideas which seemed good to the early men in order to communicate their thoughts by gestures, and under what circumstances articulate sounds were invented I should give my "theoretical mute" plenty of time to compose his replies; and as to the questions, I would make a point of introducing ideas whose expression by means of gesture I should be most anxious to learn. It would be both useful and entertaining to multiply experiments upon these ideas, and to propound the same questions to a number of persons at once. I believe that a philosopher who practised such experiments with some friends, who were intelligent men and good logicians, would not find it a total waste of time. An Aristophanes would no doubt turn it to ridicule, but what matter? One could say what Zeno said to his disciple: *el φιλοσοφίας επιθυμείς, παρασκεναξου αύτοθεν, ως καταγελαθησόμένος, ως,* etc. *If you wish to become a philosopher, expect to be ridiculed*. That is a fine maxim, sir, and one that would elevate souls less courageous than ours above human comment and all frivolous considerations.

You must not confuse the experiment I suggest with ordinary pantomime. To translate an action and a speech into gesture are two very different things. I am sure that there are inversions in the language of our mutes, that each one has his style, and that their inversions denote differences as pronounced as those we find in ancient Greek and Latin authors. But as we always most highly approve of our own style, the discussion that would ensue after these experiments would be of the most lively and philosophical nature, for all our theoretical mutes, when they had

leave to use their tongues again, would be obliged to justify not only their expression, but also the way they placed such and such an idea in a certain order in their gestures.

This leads me to another idea that is a little alien to the subject of my letter, but in a letter digressions are allowed, especially when they lead to useful results. My idea would be to analyse, as it were, a man, and to examine what he derives from each of his senses. I have sometimes amused myself with this kind of metaphysical anatomy, and I consider that of all the senses the eye was the most superficial, the ear the proudest, smell the most voluptuous, taste the profoundest and most philosophical. It would be amusing to get together a society, of which each should have only one sense; there can be no doubt that all these persons would look on one another as out of his wits, and I leave you to judge with what reason. And yet this is an example of what happens amongst us every day; we have, so to speak, only one sense, and we judge of everything. We may remark that this group of five persons, each possessing only one sense, might by their faculty of abstraction have one interest in common — that of geometry, — and might understand one another on that subject, and that alone. But to return to our theoretical mutes, and to the questions we should put them.

If these questions were such that more than one answer was possible, it would follow that one mute would give one, and another mute another; and that the comparison between their replies would become impossible or at any rate difficult This difficulty suggested to me that a speech for translation from French to gesture-language would be better than a question for experimental purposes. The translators must be warned to avoid ellipsis, for the language of gesture is difficult enough without increasing its laconism by the use of this figure.

By the efforts of those born deaf and dumb to make themselves understood, we see they express all they are able to express. I should

therefore recommend our theoretical mutes to copy them, and, as far as is possible, to form no sentence where the subject and the attribute with all their dependencies are not expressed. In short, they would only be allowed the choice of the order in which they would present ideas, or rather the gestures representing these ideas.

But there I see a difficulty. As thoughts, I know not by what contrivance, enter our mind very much in the form in which they appear in speech when they are tricked up, it is possible that this will cause some difficulty to our theoretical mutes; perhaps they would be tempted to imitate the order of the words in the spoken language they are already familiar with — a temptation which assails almost everyone who writes in a foreign language. All of our best modern Latinists fall into French constructions, so that perhaps our mutes' construction will not be the construction of a man who had never had any notion of speech. What do you say? Perhaps this difficulty would be of less frequent occurrence if our theoretical mutes were philosophers or orators; but if this obstacle arises we might have recourse to one born deaf and dumb.

You will doubtless think this a singular way of obtaining true notions of the formation of a language. But pray consider, how much less far from truth ignorance is than prejudice, and that a man born deaf and dumb has no prejudices with regard to the manner of communicating his thoughts. Consider that inversions have not passed into his language from another, and that if he uses them it is nature alone which suggests their use; that he is closely analogous to those beings people have imagined who with no trace of education, very few perceptions, and almost no memory, might easily pass for two-footed or four-footed animals.

I can assure you, sir, that a translation of this gesture language would do the translator great credit, for not only must he have completely understood the meaning and the thought, but the order of the words of the translation

must faithfully follow the order of the gestures of the original. (To do this a philosopher would have to question his author, hear his replies, and represent them with exactness; but philosophy is not learnt in a day.) One of these requisites would, however, facilitate the rest; and if the question was given with a precise explanation of the gestures which are to compose the answer, it would be possible to represent gestures as far as possible by words. I say as far as possible, for there are gestures so sublime that the noblest eloquence can never translate them. Such is the scene in Shakespeare's tragedy of Macbeth. Lady Macbeth, walking in her sleep, advances silently with closed eyes (Act v, Scene i), and rubbing her hands together as if she were washing away the stain of the king's blood she had shed twenty years before. I know nothing in speech so pathetic as the silence and motion of this woman's hands. What an expression of remorse!

The way in which another woman carried the tidings of his death to her husband, who was still uncertain of his fate, is another example of a gesture unapproached in its vigour by the spoken word. She went with her son in her arms to a spot in the country which her husband could see from the tower in which he was imprisoned; and, after looking for some time at the tower, she took a handful of earth which she scattered in the form of a cross on the body of her son, whom she had laid at her feet. Her husband understood the sign, and starved himself to death. The sublimest thought is forgotten, but these actions are never effaced from one's memory. I could make many reflections at this point on sublimity of situation, but they would take me too far from my subject.

Many of the fine lines in that magnificent scene in *Heraclius*, where Phocas does not know which of the two princes is his son, have been justly admired. For my part, the passage in the scene that I prefer is that where the tyrant turns to each of the princes in turn, and calls them by the name of his son, and they both remain cold and motionless: —

"*Martian, à ce mot aucun ne veut répondre*." This cannot be put upon paper, and gesture here triumphs over speech.

Epaminondas, at the battle of Mantinaea, is mortally wounded; the doctors tell him he will die when the spear is drawn from his body. He asks for his shield, for it is dishonourable to lose the shield in battle; and when this is brought to him, he draws out the spear-head himself. In the sublime scene at the close of the tragedy of Rhodogune, the most effective moment is certainly when Antiochus lifts the bowl to his lips, and Timagène enters crying "Ah, lord!" (Act v, Scene iv). What a throng of ideas and emotions crowd upon the audience at this gesture and this cry! But I am digressing. To come back to our man born deaf and mute. I know of one who would be useful for experimental purposes, because he is intelligent and has expressive gestures, as you shall see.

I was playing chess one day, and the dumb man was watching. My opponent fought me to a difficult position, and the dumb man quite understood, and, thinking the game was lost, he closed his eyes, drooped his head, and let fall his arms — as a sign that he considered me checkmated, or done for. Consider for a moment how metaphorical is the language of gesture. At first I thought as he did; but as I had not exhausted the combinations, I was in no hurry to yield, and I looked about for a way out. The dumb man still thought there was none, and he expressed this very clearly by shaking his head and by putting back the lost pieces in the box. His example induced the other spectators to discuss the situation; they examined it, and, after some fruitless expedients had been tried, a successful one was discovered. I made use of it, and explained to the dumb man that he was mistaken, and that I had escaped though he did not expect me to. But he, by pointing his finger at the spectators one after another, and making a motion of the lips, accompanied by a sweeping movement of his arms in the direction of the door and the tables, replied that it was no credit

to me to have got out of my difficulty by calling in all and sundry to my help. His gestures were so significant that no one could misunderstand him, and the popular expression “all and sundry” occurred to many at the same time: this expression was definitely translated by our dumb man’s gestures.

You know, at least you have heard, of a singular machine with which the inventor proposed to give sonatas in colour. I thought that if anyone could appreciate a performance of ocular music, and could judge of it without prejudice, it would be a man born deaf and dumb. I therefore took my friend to the house in the rue St Jacques, where the operator and the machine with colours was exhibited. Ah, sir, you would never guess the kind of impression that it made on him, nor the ideas it suggested.

You see that it was impossible to explain to him beforehand the nature and marvellous powers of the harpsichord; and, having no idea of sound, this instrument with colours could not suggest to him any musical impressions. The purpose of the machine was as incomprehensible to him as the use of our organs of speech. What, then, were his thoughts, and what was the cause of his admiration for Father Castel’s coloured fans? Guess, sir, his conjectures about this ingenious machine, which very few people have seen, though many have talked about it, and whose invention would do honour to many of those who ridicule it. Our deaf-and-dumb friend imagined that the inventor was also deaf and dumb, and that his harpsichord was the instrument by which he communicated with other men; he imagined also that each shade of colour represented a letter of the alphabet, and that by touching the keys rapidly he combined these letters into words and phrases, and, in fact, spoke in colours.

You may imagine he was pleased with his own perspicacity in finding this out; but our friend did not rest on his laurels; the idea suddenly came into his head that he now grasped what music and musical instruments were. He supposed that music “was a peculiar manner of communicating

thought, and that musical instruments — lutes, violins, and trumpets — were so many different organs of speech. You will say that only a man who had never heard music or a musical instrument could have happened on such a theory. But please consider that this theory, although obviously false to you, seemed almost proved to a deaf-and-dumb person. When the deaf-and-dumb man calls to mind the attention he has observed us pay to music and to musicians, and the evidences of joy or grief depicted on our countenances and in our gestures as we listen to beautiful music, and when he compares them with the similar effects produced by speech or by visible objects, he cannot imagine that music has no definite meaning and that vocal and instrumental music arouses in us no distinct impressions.

And is not this, sir, an exact symbol of the way in which we form ideas, our theories, and, in a word, the conceptions by which so many philosophers have won fame? Whenever they attempt to explain matters which seem to demand another organ which is lacking before they can be completely understood, they have often shown less penetration and have wandered further from the truth than the deaf mute I have been describing; for, after all, if we do not express our thoughts as distinctly by means of musical instruments as with our lips, and if musical notes do not convey our ideas as distinctly as speech, yet they do convey something.

The blind man I described in the *Letter on the Blind* assuredly displayed great penetration in his conception of the use of the telescope and spectacles, and his definition of a mirror is very remarkable; but there is more profundity and truth in my deaf-mute's notion of Father Castel's harpsichord and of our music and musical instruments. Even if he did not hit upon the exact truth, he hit upon a great possibility. This penetration will surprise you less, perhaps, if you fancy that everyone who walks through a picture gallery is really unconsciously acting the part of a deaf man who is amusing himself by examining the dumb who are conversing on subjects

familiar to him. This is one of the points of view with which I always look at pictures; and I fancy it a sure means of divining ambiguous actions and equivocal movements; of being at once aware of the frigidity and confusion of an ill-arranged action or of conversation; and of seeing at once, in a scene rendered in painting, all the faults of languid or exaggerated acting. The term “acting “ which I have just used, because it expresses what I mean, calls to my mind another mode of studying which I often employed and which taught me more about actions and gestures than all the books in the world. I used to frequent the theatre, and I knew by heart most of our best plays. On the days when I meant to examine actions and gestures I would climb to the gallery, for the further I was from the actors the better. As soon as the curtain was raised, and the rest of the audience disposed themselves to listen, I put my fingers in my ears, much to the astonishment of my neighbours; not knowing my motives, they looked on me as a madman who only came to the play to miss it. I paid no attention to their remarks, and kept my fingers obstinately in my ears as long as the gestures and actions of the actor corresponded with the dialogue which I remembered. When I was puzzled by the gestures I took my fingers from my ears and listened. Ah, how few actors there are who can stand such a test, and how humiliated the majority would be if I were to give the world my criticisms! But judge of my neighbours’ surprise when they saw me shed tears at the pathetic passages, though I had my fingers in my ears. That was too much for them, and even the least inquisitive began to question me. But I coolly answered that “everybody had his own way of listening, and mine was to shut my ears to hear the better,” and found some silent amusement in the comments caused by my real or apparent eccentricity and in the simplicity of some young people who also tried putting their fingers in their ears to hear as I did, and were surprised at their lack of success.

Whatever you may think of my expedient, pray consider that if, to judge correctly of intonation, we must listen to an actor without looking at him, it is very natural to watch an actor without hearing him, if we are to judge correctly of his gestures and action. I may add that the celebrated writer of plays, Le Sage, the author of *The Lame Devil*, *The Bachelor of Salamanca*, *Gil Bias of Santiliana, Turcaret*, and a number of plays and comic operas in which his son, the inimitable Montmeny, took part, became so deaf in his old age that people had to shout into his ear-trumpet. Yet he was in the habit of frequenting the theatre to see his pieces played, and could follow them almost word for word; indeed, he said he was a better judge of his plays and their action when he could no longer hear the actors; and I am certain, from my own personal experience, that he was right.

In studying gesture language it appears to me the principal idea should be presented first, because it throws light on the rest as indicating what the succeeding gestures refer to. When the subject of a proposition in oratory or gesticulation is not announced, the significance of the other gestures or words remains uncertain. This is certainly the case in Greek or Latin phrases, but not in the language of gesture when properly constructed. Suppose I am at table with a deaf-mute, and he wishes to tell his servant to give me some wine. He first beckons to his servant, then looks at me, then he imitates the action of a man pouring out wine. In this sentence it hardly matters which of the last two signs comes first: the deaf mute, after beckoning to his servant, may either begin with the sign representing his order or that denoting the person whom the order concerns; but the position of the first gesture cannot be altered. Only an illogical mute could displace it. For this displacement would be as absurd as a man speaking without knowing whom he was addressing. As to the order of the two other gestures, it is a matter of taste, fancy, suitability, and harmony of style, and does not affect the sense. As a rule, the more ideas there are in a sentence,

and the more possible arrangement of gestures or other signs there are, the greater danger of falling into contradictions, ambiguities, and other faults of construction. I do not know if we can justly estimate a man's opinions and morals by his writings, but I think we can form a good judgment of his intellectual abilities from his style, or rather his manner of constructing sentences. I can at least say that I have never found myself mistaken in my judgment. I have observed that every writer whose sentences had to be completely rewritten would also have required an entirely new brain before he was fit for anything.

But how is it possible in a dead language to use correct constructions when there are so many possible ways of arranging words? Our language is so simple and uniform that I venture to say it will be easier to write and speak French correctly, if it were to die, than it is possible to write Latin and Greek now. How many inversions do we use to-day in Latin and Greek which would not have been permitted in the days of Cicero and Demosthenes and which the refined ears of those orators would have rejected?

But, people will tell me, have we not in our language adjectives which are only used before a substantive, and others which are only used after? How can our posterity learn these fine distinctions? Reading good authors is not enough. I agree with you; and if the French language dies, future savants, who care enough for our literature to learn and write our language, will be sure to write indifferently blanc bonnet or bonnet blanc, méchant auteur or auteur méchant, homme galant and galant homme, and a vast number of similar phrases which would make nonsense of their writings were we to rise up to read them, — but which would not prevent their ignorant contemporaries from exclaiming when they read some such piece: "Racine did not write more correctly," or "That is just like Despreaux; Bossuet could not have said it better; this prose has the music, the force, the

elegance and ease of Voltaire's." But if a limited number of difficulties may cause those who come after us to stumble, what are we to think of our modern Greek and Latin authors and of the admiration they obtain?

In talking to a deaf-mute it is found to be almost impossible to describe to him indefinite portions of quantity, number, space, or time, or to make him grasp any abstract idea. One can never be sure that he realises the difference in tense between *I made*, *I have made*, *I was makings* and *I should have made.* It is the same with conditional propositions. If, then, — I was right in saying that at the origin of language men first named the principal objects of sense, such as fruit, water, trees, animals, serpents, etc., and then named passions, places, and persons, qualities, seasons, etc., I may add that signs for periods of time and tenses were invented last of all. I imagine that for long centuries men had no other tenses than the present indicative and the infinitive, which became, according to the circumstances, either a future or a past.

I am supported in this conjecture by the present state of the *lingua franca* — the language spoken by the various Christian nations trading with Turkey and the Levant ports. I believe it is the same today that it has always been, and that it will never develop. Its base is a corrupt Italian. The present infinitive is used for every tense, and its meaning is modified by guessing and by the other words of the sentence. Thus, *I love thee*, *I was loving thee*, *I shall love thee*, are all in *lingua franca,* " *mi amarti All have sung, Let each one sing, All will sing,* are" *tutti cantara.*" *I wish*, *I was wishing*, *I have wished*, *I should like to marry you,* are "*mi voleri sposarti.*"

I imagine that inversions have crept into a language and been preserved in it because gesture language gave rise to the language of oratory, and that they naturally retained the position thus assigned to them in the sentence. I also think that, for the same reason, as tense was not accurately defined even after conjunctions were formed, some languages, like Hebrew, which

has no present or imperfect, did without certain tenses. They said *Credidi propter quod locutus sum* instead of *Credo et ideo loquor: I have believed, and therefore I have spoken,* instead of *I believe*, *and therefore I speak.*

In other languages the same tense had two different meanings, as in the Greek language, where the aorist is at one time expressive of the present, at another of the past. Let me quote as an illustration — there are many others — a passage in the Enchiridion, which is perhaps not so familiar to you as some. Epictetus says:

> Θέλουσι καὶ αὐτοὶ φιλοσοφεῖν. Ἄνθρωπε, πρῶτον ἐπίσκεψαι, ὁποῖον ἐστι τὸ πρᾶγμα· εἶτα καὶ τὴν σεαυτοῦ φύσιν κατάμαθε, εἰ δύνασαι βαστάσαι. Πένταθλος εἶναι βούλει, ἢ παλαιστής; ἴδε σεαυτοῦ τοὺς βραχίονας, τοὺς μηροὺς, τὴν ὀσφῦν κατάμαθε (ch. xxix).

A close translation is: “These men also wish to be philosophers; O man, first have learnt what it is that you wish to be, *have studied* your strength and the burden, *have considered* your arms and thighs, *have tried* your loins if you intend to be a pentathlete or a wrestler.” This can be much better translated by substituting the present for the first and second aorists; thus: “These men also wish to be philosophers. Man, first learn what it is you wish to be; study your strength, and the burden; consider your arms and thighs; *try* your loins if you intend to be a pentathlete or a wrestler.” The pentathlete, as you know, was one who intended to enter for all the gymnastic exercises.

I consider these eccentricities of tense as the result of the original imperfection of languages and the traces of their original rudimentary state, against which common sense (which does not allow one and the same expression to render different ideas) vainly strove in after times. It was in vain; the usage was fixed, and use won a victory over common sense. But

there was, perhaps, not a single Latin and Greek author who was aware of this defect. I go further, and maintain that every Greek and Latin author probably imagined in their speeches and writings that their words exactly followed the order of their ideas. But evidently it was not so. When Cicero begins his oration *pro Marcello* by *Diuturni silentii, Patres conscripti*, *quo eram his temporibus usus*, etc., we can see that he was thinking of something before his " long silence" — an idea which was to follow and break in upon his " long silence," and which caused him to say *Diuturni silentii* instead of *Diuturnum silentium*. This remark upon the inversion of the beginning of this oration applies equally to all cases of inversion; as a rule, in all Greek and Latin periods, however long they may be, we observe at once that the writer had some reason for preferring to use certain cases, and that there was not the same inversion in his ideas as in the order of his words. In the above sentence of Cicero's, what made him use the genitive case in *Diuturni silentii*, the ablative in *quo,* the imperfect tense in *eram*, and so on, was the order of ideas pre-existing in his mind which did not coincide with the order of the words — an order he obeyed unconsciously, from a long practice in transposition. Why should Cicero not have used inversion unconsciously, since we, who think our language follows the natural order of ideas, do so too? I was therefore justified in distinguishing between the natural and the acquired or scientific order of ideas and signs.

You thought, sir, it might be argued, that there was no inversion in that period of Cicero's; you are mistaken, but two considerations which have escaped your notice will convince you. The first is, that as inversion proper, or the acquired, scientific and grammatical order, is really an order in words which does not correspond to the order in ideas, what is inversion for one is not so for another, for different minds may put their words in different order. For instance, in the sentence *serpentem fuge* I would ask you which is the principal idea. *You* may say that it is the serpent, but another will say it

is flight; and both of you may be right. A timid man thinks only of the serpent; but the man who fears my danger more than he fears the serpent thinks only of my flight: one is overwhelmed by terror, the other gives me warning. The second thing I would remark is, that when we are presenting a series of ideas to others, and the main idea we wish to impress upon them is not the one by which we ourselves are most impressed (because we and our hearers are differently situated), it is this former idea which we should present first, and such an inversion is but a matter of oratory. Let us apply these observations to the first period of the oration pr*o Marcello*. I picture to myself Cicero mounting the tribune to speak to the people; and I see that the first idea that will strike his audience is that it is a long time since he spoke to them; hence *diuturni sileniii*, his prolonged silence, is the first idea he must present to them, although the principal idea in his mind is rather *hodiernus dies finem attulit*; for the orator's main preoccupation is the speech he is about to make, not his past silence. I notice another reason for the use of the genitive case in *diuturni sileniii*; the audience could not realise the fact of Cicero's prolonged silence without seeking for the cause of it, and why he was at last breaking it. Now the genitive, being a case incomplete in itself, induces the minds of his hearers to travel onwards to meet the ideas that the orator could not present at once.

These are, sir, the remarks upon the passage in question which you might have made. I am sure Cicero would have arranged this period quite differently, if, instead of speaking at Rome, he had been suddenly transported to Africa to plead at Carthage. This will show that what was not an inversion for Cicero's hearers would be and must be one for the orator himself.

But to go a little further: I hold that when a phrase only contains very few ideas, it is very difficult to determine the natural order of these ideas in relation to the speaker; for if they are not all presented at once, their

succession is so rapid that it is often impossible to decide which strikes us first. Who can say if the mind cannot embrace a certain number at one and the same instant? Perhaps you will call this paradoxical; but let us examine together how the article *hic*, *ille*, *le* came to be introduced into Latin and into our language. It will not be a long or difficult matter, and may induce you to accept a position that you find distasteful at present.

Let us first transport ourselves to the period when Latin adjectives and substantives which denoted the qualities perceived by sense in various natural objects were almost all invented, but when no expression had yet been found for those intellectual subtilties which philosophy has even to-day much difficulty in distinguishing. Next imagine two hungry men, one of whom could see no food, while the other stood beneath a tree so very tall that he could not reach its fruit. Their sensations make both these men speak; the first would say: I am hungry, I would like to eat; and the second, What beautiful fruit! I am hungry, I would like to eat. Now, it is obvious that the former has adequately expressed in words all that passed in his mind; while the latter has left something unexpressed — a portion of his thought must be supplied. The expression I would like to eat, when no food is to be seen, applies generally to all food that could appease hunger; but the same expression is limited in its application, and refers only to a fine fruit when that fruit is to be seen. Thus, though they both said I am hungry, I would like to eat, the man who exclaimed “What a fine fruit!” returned in thought to this fruit, and I make no doubt that if the article *le* had been in use he would have said: *What fine fruit! I am hungry; I would like to eat this* (or this I would like to eat). The article *le* or *celui* in this case and in other similar cases denotes that the mind reverts to an object which it had previously considered, and the invention of this symbol is, I think, a proof of the progress of the mind.

Do not raise difficulties about the position this word ought to occupy in the sentence in accordance with the natural order of ideas, for though these statements, *What fine fruit! I am hungry, I would like to eat that*, are each expressed by two or three words, each only denotes a single notion; the midmost sentence, *I am hungry*, is expressed in Latin by a single word *esurio*. The fruit and its quality are perceived at the same time; and when a Roman said *esurio* he only imagined he was expressing a single idea. *I would much like to eat that* are only modes of single sensation. I denotes the person who experiences it; *would like to eat*, the desire and the nature of the sensation experienced; *much*, its intensity; *it*, the presence of the desired object. But in the mind there is not the successive development we observe in speech; if it had twenty mouths, and each mouth able to say a word, all the above ideas would be expressed at once. This could be excellently executed on Father Castel's harpsichord, if our dumb friend's theory were in practice and each colour combined to form words. No tongue would approach it in the rapidity of its speech. But as we have not many mouths, people have attached several ideas to a single term. If there were more of these vigorous terms, instead of the tongue panting after the mind, such a number of ideas could be expressed at once that the mind would lag after the tongue which hastened in advance of it. What would then be the fate of inversion, which implies a disintegration of many simultaneous mental impressions and a number of words? Although we have few words equivalent to a long speech, we have some, and Greek and Latin are full of them; they are at once understood when used, and this is a proof that the mind experiences a multitude of sensations, if not simultaneously, yet in such rapid succession that it is impossible to distinguish their order.

If I had to explain this system of the human understanding to one who found it difficult to grasp abstract ideas, I should say, "Consider man as a walking clock; the heart as its mainspring, the contents of the thorax as the

principal parts of the works; look on the head as a bell furnished with little hammers attached to an infinite number of threads which are carried to all corners of the clock-case. Fix upon the bell one of those little figures with which we ornament the top of our clocks, and let it listen, like a musician who listens to see if his instrument is in tune: this little figure is the soul. If many of these little threads are pulled at once, the bell will be struck several times, and the little figure will hear several notes simultaneously. Imagine that there are some of these threads that are always being pulled; and just as we only notice the noise of Paris by day when it ceases at night, we shall be unconscious of some sensations which are continuous, such as of our existence. The mind, especially in health, is unconscious of its own existence, unless it deliberately examines itself. When we are well, we are unconscious of any part of our body; and if any part draws attention to itself by pain, we are certainly not well; and if it is by a pleasurable sensation, it is by no means certain that we are the better for it."

I could pursue my analogy still further, and add that the sounds produced by the bell do not die away at once, but have some duration; that they produce chords with the sounds that follow, and the little figure that listens compares them, and pronounces them harmonious or dissonant; that memory, which we need to form opinions and to speak, is the resonance of the bell; the judgment, the formation of chords; and speech, a succession of chords. It is not without reason that some brains are said to be "cracked," like a bell. And is not the law, which is so necessary in a series of harmonies, of having at least one note common to the chord and that following it, also applicable? Does not this common note resemble the middle term of a syllogism? And what else is the likeness we observe in certain minds but the result of some freak of nature by which two intervals are marked, one a fifth and the other a third, in relation to another note? By this fertile analogy, and with all the madness of Pythagoras, I might

demonstrate the wisdom of that Scythian law which prescribed one friend as a necessity, permitted two, and forbade three. Among the Scythians, I might say, a man was “out of tune” if the note which he gave forth found no harmonic among his fellow-men; three friends would make a perfect accord; while a fourth superadded would be but a repetition of one of the former three, or would introduce a discordant note,; But enough of this language of metaphor, which at best is but fitted to amuse and arrest the volatile mind of a child; let us come back to philosophy, which requires arguments and not analogies.

When people examined the various utterances called forth by the sensations of hunger and thirst, they observed that the same terms were used to express different notions; and the symbols *you, ke*$_y$ *me*, *the*$_y$ and many others, were invented for the sake of precision. A mental state during an indivisible moment of time was expressed by a number of words which divided the complete expression into a number of parts; and because these words were uttered one after another, and were only understood in the order they were spoken, it was thought that the sensations they expressed were experienced by the mind in the same order. But this is not the case. Our mental state is one thing, our analysis of it quite another. This is so, whether we analyse it to ourselves or to others. The complete and instantaneous perception of this state is one thing; the detailed and continuous effort of attention we make to analyse it, state it, and explain it to others, another. Our mind is a moving scene, which we are perpetually copying. We spend a great deal of time in rendering it faithfully; but the original exists as a complete whole, for the mind does not proceed step by step, like expression. The brush takes time to represent what the artist’s eye sees in an instant In the growth of language, decomposition was a necessity; but to *see* an object, to *admire* it, to *experience* an agreeable sensation, and to *desire* to *possess* it, is but an instantaneous emotion, rendered in Greek and Latin by

a single word. This word once uttered, all is said and understood. Ah, how our understanding is modified by words, and how cold a copy of reality is the most vigorous utterance!

> Les ronces dégouttantes
> Portent de ses cheveux les dépouilles sanglantes.

This is one of the most life-like pictures I know, but yet how far is it from my imagination!

I beg of you, sir, to consider these points if you wish for a juster notion of this complex question of inversion. For my part, I am fitter to gather a cloud than to scatter it, to suspend my judgment than to give a verdict; and I am going to prove that if the paradox that I have just advanced does not hold good, and if our mind does not allow of several perceptions at one and the same time, it would be impossible to think and speak; for thought and speech consist in the comparison of two or more ideas. Now, how is it possible to compare ideas which are not both at once present in the mind? You allow that we can experience more than one sensation at a time; for example, we can perceive the colour and shape of a body at the same time; why not also abstract ideas? Does not memory employ two ideas present at the same time in the mind — the actual idea, and the remembrance of the former? For my part, I think that is why a good judgment and a good memory are rarely found together. A good memory presupposes a great facility in embracing various ideas at one and the same moment or in rapid succession; and this gift interferes with the tranquil examination of a small number of ideas which the mind ought to contemplate with fixed attention. A mind stored with a huge variety of things is like a library of odd volumes; it is like one of these German compilations bristling with Hebrew, Arabic, Greek, or Latin quotations put together without judgment or taste; which are ponderous as it is, and which will grow more and more ponderous, and

grow none the better; a store full of analyses and appreciations and ill-digested works, and shops of mixed goods where the memorandum alone is in order; a commentary where we scarcely ever find what we want, but often what we don't want, and almost always what we want is lost in a heap of rubbish.

It follows from the foregoing statements there is not, and perhaps there cannot be, inversion in the mind, especially if the object contemplated be an abstract one; and though a Greek may say: *νικησαι οΚύμττία θ εΧεις*; *καγω*, *νη τους θεούς κομ'ψον yap iceotti* (Epictetus, *Enchiridion*, ch. xxix) and a Roman *Honores plurimum valent apndpi'itdentes*, *si sibi collatos intelligani,* French syntax and common sense find this Greek and Latin syntax embarrassing, and say without any inversion: *You would like to belong to the French Academy? So should I; for it is an honourable distinction*, *and the wise man may value a distinction which he feels he deserves*.

I would not therefore care to maintain without distinction the general statement that the Romans did not use inversion, whereas we do. I should merely say, if instead of comparing our sentence with the order of ideas we compared it with the order of the inversion of words, with gesture-language, for which spoken language has been gradually substituted, it would appear that we invert; and we use more inversions than any other nation in the world. But if our construction is compared with that of a mind influenced by Greek and Latin syntax, we have the fewest possible inversions. We express things in French in the order the mind has to consider them, whatever the language. Cicero, if we may say so, followed the French order before obeying the Latin.

It follows that, since the communication of thought is the principal object of a language, French is of all languages the best organised, the most precise, and the most excellent, for it retains less than any other the

negligences, or what I may call the lispings, of the childhood of the race: in other words, by having no inversions we have gained in clearness and precision, which are essential qualities in writing; but on the other hand we have lost in warmth, in energy, and in eloquence. I may add that the orderly and didactic movement of our language makes it peculiarly suitable for science; but the Latin, Italian, and English languages, which allow of inversion, are more suited for literature. We can express the intellect better than any other nation, and common sense will choose French for its utterances; but imagination and the passions will prefer the ancient tongues, and that of our neighbours, to ours. French should be the language of society and of the schools of philosophy; Greek, Latin, and English, the language of our lecture-halls, pulpits, and theatres; but if truth return to earth, I believe French would be her chosen speech, while Greek, Latin and the other tongues will be the language of fables and falsehoods. French is the language for teaching, enlightening, and convincing; Greek, Latin, Italian and English for persuading, stirring the passions, and hoodwinking; talk Greek or Latin or Italian to the multitude, but talk French to the wise.

Another drawback to languages with inversions is that the attention of the reader or hearer is taxed. How many cases, tenses, and terminations are there not to bear in mind in a long Greek or Latin sentence? It is almost incomprehensible until one reaches the last word; while in French there is none of this strain, and we can understand as we go along. Ideas in our language are presented in the order they presented themselves to the mind, whether the mind be Greek or Latin. La Bruyère is less fatiguing to read in the long run than Livy, though the former is a profound moralist, the latter a simple historian; but the historian sets his sentences and phrases so artificially, that we are continually removing them from their sockets, and restoring them to their clear and natural order, and insensibly weary of the toil, just as the strongest arm wearies of a small weight which is constantly

carried. So, take it all in all, our pedestrian language has the advantage of utility over the others.

But there is a motive which both in French and in the ancient tongues disturbs the natural order of ideas, and that is the desire for harmony of style — a desire which is now become so imperative that we are ready to sacrifice a great deal to it. For we must distinguish between three phases that all languages pass through when they have left that earliest stage when they were merely a confusion of cries and gestures which we may call the animal phase. These three phases are birth, development, and perfection. The newly-born language was made up of words and gestures in which adjectives - without gender or case and verbs without tenses and not governing cases preserved the same terminations throughout. In the developed language there were words, cases, genders; and verbs were conjugated and governed cases. In fact, there were all the necessary signs for expressing thought, but nothing more. In the perfected language, beauty was required; for people thought the ear must be pleased as well as the mind. But as the subsidiary is often thus set before the principal thing in the sentence, the order of ideas is often disturbed to procure this harmony of style. This is what Cicero has done in part of his opening period in the pro Marcello; for the first idea that “he should have presented to his hearers, after that of his long silence, was the reason for this silence. He should therefore have said: Diuturni silentii, quo, non timoré aliquo, sed partim dolore, partim verecundia, eram his temporibus uszts, jinem, hodiernus *dies attulit.* Compare this sentence with the original, and you will find no reason why it should not have been used by him, except that of harmony. Another instance is the great orator’s phrase, *Mors terrorque civium ac sociorum Romano rump* where it is evident that the natural order required *terror morsque.* There are a number of other examples I could quote.

This leads us to the question whether the natural order should be sacrificed for the sake of harmony. I think this is permissible when the inverted ideas are so close to one another that they strike the ear and mind almost at the same moment; just as we transpose the fundamental bass into a higher clef to make it more tuneful, although the transposed bass will only be agreeable so long as the ear can distinguish the natural progressions of the fundamental bass which suggested it. Do not think from this remark that I am a great musician; it is only two days ago that I began to be one; but you know how one likes to parade some new accomplishment. I think we might discover several analogies between musical harmony and harmony of style. When, for instance, we are about to describe some great or wonderful events, the harmony of style must be sacrificed or at least disturbed. So we say:

Magnum Jovis incrementum.
Nec brachia longo
Margine terrarum porrexerat Amphitrite.
Ferte citi ferrum, date tela, scandite muros.
Vita quoque omnis
Omnibus e nervis atque ossibus exsolvatur.
Longo sed proximus intervallo.

In a similar manner in music we must sometimes shock the ear in order to surprise and please the imagination. We may also observe, that though these licences in the order of words are only permitted for the sake of the harmony of style, licences in harmony, on the other hand, are chiefly taken to arouse and give rise in the most natural order to the ideas which the musician wishes to express.

In speech we must distinguish between thought and expression; if thought is expressed with purity, clarity, and precision, this is quite sufficient for ordinary conversation; if you add to these a certain distinction in the use of words and a certain rhythm and harmony, you will have a style

well fitted for an orator, but you will still be far removed from poetry, especially from the grand style of the epic and the ode. There is a spirit in the poet's language which moves there and breathes life into each syllable. What is this spirit? I have felt its presence, but find it difficult to describe. I may say that it states and paints objects at the same time; it appeals not only to the understanding, but to the soul which it stirs and the imagination that sees and the ear that hears. The lines are not merely a chain of vigorous words which express the thought both forcibly and nobly, but a series of hieroglyphs, one after another, which picture the thought to us vividly. I might say that all poetry is symbolic.

But it is not everyone who can understand these symbols. In order to feel their full force we must be, as it were, in the creative mood. The poet says:

> Et des fleuves françaises les eaux ensanglantées
> Ne portaient que des morts aux mers épouvantées.

Does everybody appreciate the value of the first syllable of the word *portaient,* which paints us the waters swollen with corpses and the stream choked, as it were, by this obstacle? And in the second syllable of the word, does everyone see the mass of waters and dead bodies subsiding and moving out to sea? The terror of the sea is brought before us all in the word *épouvantées*, but the stress laid on the third syllable brings before me the vast extent of the ocean. Again, the poet says:

> Soupire, étend les bras, ferme? œil et s'endort?

All exclaim, "How fine!" but it is not by counting the syllables on one's fingers that we can judge how fortunate the poet was, when expressing a sigh, to have such a word as *soupire* with its long-drawn sound. We read *étend les bras*, but we hardly realise how the impression of length and lassitude is expressed by the long monosyllable *bras*, and the" outstretched

arms" fall so reposefully on the ear at the close of the first hemistich of the line. Do we notice the rapid movement of the eyelid in *ferme l'œil* and the almost imperceptible change from wakefulness to sleep at the close of the second hemistich *ferme l'œil et s'endort?*

The cultivated reader will of course observe that the poet has four actions to represent, and that his line is divided into four parts; that the two last actions are closely interrelated, and that they have scarcely an interval between them; and that the two last and corresponding parts of the line are also closely linked, united as they are by the rapidity of the movement of the penultimate part and by a conjunction; that each of the actions takes only its proper proportion of time in the verse; and that as all four actions are comprised in this small space, the poet has expressed their rapid succession in nature. That is the kind of problem that the poet's genius solves unconsciously; but do his readers realise his skill? Certainly not; and I shall not therefore be surprised if those readers of Boileau (and there are many) who have not understood the meaning of his symbols laugh at my commentary, and, remembering the *Chefœuvre d'un inconnu,* treat me as a visionary.

I used to think, like everybody else, that one poet could translate another, but I have found out my mistake. The thought can be rendered, and perhaps by good fortune the equivalent expression. Homer said: εκλαγξαν δ' αρ οιστοι (Iliad, Cant, i, v. 46) and tela sonant humeris is Virgil's version (Æneid, lib. iv, v. 149). That is something, but not all; the suggestive symbolism, the subtle hieroglyphs which pervade a long description, and which depend on the distribution of long and short syllables in an unaccented language and on the distribution of vowels between consonants in all languages, disappear even in the best translation.

Virgil writes of Euryalus stricken by a mortal wound:

Pulchosque per artus
It cruor, inque humeros cervix collapsa recumbit:
Purpureus veluti quum flos, succisus aratro,
Languescit moriens; lassove papavera collo
Demisere caput, pluviam quum forte gravantur.

I should just as soon expect these lines to have sprung from letters scattered at haphazard, as that a translation could render all the suggestive beauties: the gush of blood, *it cruor*; the drooping head of the dying lad, *cervix collapsa recumbit*; the sound of the scythe, *succisus*; the languor of death, *languescit moriens*; the softness of the poppystalk, *lassove papavera collo*; and the *demis ere caput* and *gravantur* suitably complete the picture. *Demis ere* is as soft as the stalk of a flower; *gravantur* is as heavy as its cup heavy with rain; *collapsa* expresses effort and relapse. The same symbolic suggestion is to be found in *papavera*; the first two syllables show the poppy with head erect, and in the last two it droops. All these pictures are compressed in these four lines of Virgil. You have been affected by the happy parody in Petronius of Virgil's *lassove papavera collo* applied to the exhaustion of Ascyltus when he quits Circe; and you would not have so keenly appreciated Petronius' use of the phrase if you did not recognise in it a faithful picture of the plight of Ascyltus.

This analysis of Virgil ought to be enough for me; and after drawing attention to more beauties than are perhaps to be found in the original — certainly more than the poet deliberately thought of, — my imagination and taste ought to be completely satisfied. No, sir; I am about to expose myself to two criticisms — of having seen beauties that were not there, and criticised defects that were also nonexistent. Now for it. I think the word *gravantur* is a little too heavy for the light poppy flower, and the *aratro* following *succisus* does not to me complete the suggestive picture. I am convinced Homer would have concluded his line with a word that would

have continued the sound of a cutting implement, or have depicted to my imagination the soft drooping of a flower.

It is the recognition of, or rather the vivid feeling for these symbolic expressions which are lost on the ordinary reader, that discourages men of genius from attempting a translation. That is why Virgil said that it is as difficult to take a line from Homer as to snatch a nail from the club of Hercules. The more a poet uses this symbolism, the more difficult he is to translate, and Homer is full of such suggestive symbols. Let me quote those lines where Jupiter with his dark brows confirms to ivory-shouldered Thetis his promise to avenge the injustice done to her son:

Ἦ, καὶ κυανέῃσιν ἐπ' ὀφρύσι νεῦσε Κρονίων·
Ἀμβρόσιαι δ' ἄρα χαῖται ἐπερῥώσαντο ἄνακτος
Κρατὸς ἀπ' ἀθανάτοιο· μέγαν δ' ἐλέλιξεν Ὄλυμπον.
Iliad, i, 528–530.[1]

How many images there are in these three lines! We see Jupiter's frown in επ οφρθσι, in νεθσε Κρονιων, and especially in the happy repetition of the letter κ in η, *και κυανέησιν* his flowing locks are expressed in έπερρωσαντο ανακτος; the immortal head of the god is majestically lifted by the elision of *απο* in *κράτος απ αθανάτοιο*; the shaking of Olympus is expressed in the two first syllables of ελελιξεν; the size and sound of Olympus in the last syllables of *μέγαν* and ελελιξεν and in the last word where *all Olympus trembles with its close*.

The line which I have just written is the feeble rendering of two symbols — one from Virgil, the other from Homer; one of shock, the other of fall:

And all Olympus trembles with its close.

— Ελελξεν Ολθμπον.
— Procumbit humi bos.

It is the repetition of the letter l in ελελιξεν Ολυμπον which gives the idea of trembling and shock. The same repetition of l's *s* is found in my "

Olympus trembles"; but as the *Is* are not so close together as in ελελιξεν Ολυμπον, the shaking is less rapid and also less like the movement of frowning brows. " Trembles with its close" represents *procumbit humi bos* fairly well, though the last word of my line is less heavy and emphatic than *bos* which is a greater contrast with the word *humi* than *close* is with the short words immediately preceding it. Virgil's monosyllable is thus more isolated than mine, and the fall of his ox heavier and more complete than the close of my line.

An observation I may make here, which is just as apposite as the speech of the Emperor of Mexico in the chapter about coaches in Montaigne, is that people had a singular veneration for the ancients, and a great fear of Boileau, when they asked him if the three following lines of Homer,

Ζεῦ πάτερ, ἀλλὰ σὺ ῥῦσαι ὑπ' ἠέρος υἷας Ἀχαιῶν·
Ποίησον δ' αἴθρην, δὸς δ' ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ἰδέσθαι·
Ἐν δὲ φάει καὶ ὄλεσσον, ἐπεί νύ τοι εὔαδεν οὕτως.
(*Iliad*, Cant. xvii, v. 645.)

were to be interpreted as Longinus had interpreted them, and as Boileau and La Motte had translated them, or not.

These are the true feelings of a warrior, cry Boileau and the orator Longinus. He does not ask for his life to be spared, for a hero is above such a weakness; but as he sees no opportunity of showing his courage in the midst of darkness, he is provoked at not fighting; he therefore is anxious to ask for daylight, so that his end may at least be worthy of him, even if he has to fight with Jupiter himself.

Well, sir, I shall answer Longinus and Boileau: it is not a question here of the feelings of a warrior, nor what he would say in the circumstances in which Ajax is placed (Homer apparently knew these things as well as you), but of translating these lines of Homer correctly. And if it turns out that

there are none of these sentiments you praise in these lines, what becomes of your praises and reflections? What must we think of Longinus, La Motte, and Boileau, if we find they have invented and inserted impious boasting in the place of a sublime and touching prayer? Now, this is just what has happened. Read these three lines of Homer as many times as you please, and you will find nothing but "Father of gods and men, drive away the darkness which covers our eyes, and, since you have resolved to slay us, let us die in the light."

> And must we thus without a struggle die?
> Great God, drive off the darkness from our eyes,
> And let us perish under open skies.

This translation does not give the pathos of Homer's lines, but at any rate it avoids the nonsense of La Motte and Boileau.

There is no defiance of Jupiter here, nothing but a hero ready for death, if it be the will of Jupiter, and asking no grace but to die fighting. Ζευ πατερ, *Jupiter*, Pater! Is that how the philosopher Menippus addresses Jupiter?

At the present day, when we are no longer at the mercy of the lines of the redoubtable Boileau, and the philosophic spirit has taught us to see in things only what is actually there and to praise only what is truly beautiful, I appeal to the learned men and men of taste, to Monsieur de Voltaire, to Monsieur de Fontenelle, and others, and I ask them if Boileau and La Motte have not spoilt Homer's Ajax, and Longinus vainly attempted to add to Homer's beauties. I recognise the greatness of Longinus, Boileau, and La Motte; but I am not attacking them, only defending Homer.

This passage of Jupiter's oath and many others I could quote are sufficient evidence that it is useless to try to add to Homer's beauties; and Ajax's speech is proof positive that in trying to add beauties to him there is a risk of destroying the genuine beauties of the original. However talented we are, we cannot write better than Homer, when he is at his best. At any

rate, let us understand him before trying to outdo him. But he is so full of that poetic symbolism I was just now speaking of, that we cannot claim that we have completely understood him when we have only read him ten times. We might say that Boileau in literature has suffered the same fate as Descartes in philosophy, and it is through them we have learnt to correct their minor errors.

If you ask me when this hieroglyphic use of syllables was introduced into a language, whether it is a peculiarity of a language in its early stage or in the formative period, or of the perfected period, I make answer that when men contrived their primitive language they were apparently only influenced by the facility or difficulty of pronouncing certain syllables, and this facility (or difficulty) was conditioned by the conformation of the organs of speech. They did not seem to have considered what relation the elements of these words might have from their quantity or sound to the physical characteristics of the objects they stood for. The vowel A, which is the easiest to pronounce, was first used, and it was modified in various ways before another sound was employed. The Hebrew language supports this conjecture; most of its words are modifications of the vowel A, and this peculiarity is in harmony with the traditions of this people's antiquity. If we examine Hebrew closely, we shall incline to consider it the language of the primitive inhabitants of the earth. As for the Greeks, they must have had the use of speech for a long time and have thoroughly practised the subtilties of pronunciation before they introduced quantity, harmony, and syllabic imitation of noises and actions. On the analogy of children, who, when they wish to denote an object whose name is not known to them, substitute for the name some of the object's sensible peculiarities, I conjecture that it was during the transition from the primitive stage to the formative that language became enriched with syllabic harmony, and that rhythmic harmony was

introduced into writings as the language passed from the formative to the perfected stage.

Whether these periods correspond to the actual development of language or no, one who has no feeling for the symbolic significance of words will often only appreciate the definite significance of epithets, and will be apt to call them superfluous; he will criticise ideas as loose, and images as farfetched, because he is blind to their subtle relation to the subject; he will not see that in Virgil's *it cruor* the word *it* resembles in sound a gush of blood and the falling of rain-drops on the leaves of a flower, and so he will lose one of the trifles which are all-important among the best writers.

Reading the most lucid poets, therefore, is not without its difficulties; and I can assure you there are a thousand men who can understand a geometrician for one who can understand a poet; since there are a thousand men who have common sense for one man who has taste, and a thousand men of taste for one whose taste is exquisite.

I am told that in the Abbé de Bernis' discourse when Monsieur de Bissy was received into the French Academy, Racine was blamed for want of taste in the passage where he speaks of Hippolytus:

> Il suivait, tout pensif, le chemin de Mycènes;
> Sa main sur les chevaux laissait flotter les rênes;
> Ses superbes coursiers, qu'on voyait autrefois
> *Pleins d'une ardeur si noble obéir à sa* voix,
> L'œil morne maintenant et la tête baissée,
> Semblaient se conformer à sa triste pensée.

If the Abbé is criticising the actual description, and not its suitability in the context, it would be difficult to find a better and more modern instance of the difficulty I just now spoke of, of reading poets.

There is nothing in these lines but speaks of depression and sorrow:

Il suivait, tout pensif le chemin de Mycènes;
Sa main sur les chevaux laissait flotter les rênes.

Les chevaux is better than ses chevaux; and how well the picture of what these superb horses once were contrasts with their present condition! The nodding of a horse's head, as it jogs wearily along, is imitated in a certain syllabic nutation in the line itself:

L'œil morne maintenant et la tête baissée.

But see how the poet brings all these details round to his hero:

Ses superbes coursiers, etc....
Semblaient se conformer à sa triste pensée.

The word "seemed" seems too cautious for a poet, for it is well known that animals attached to man are affected by the signs of his joy or sorrow: the elephant is affected by the death of his driver, the dog mingles his voice with his master's, and the horse is affected if his driver is sad. Racine's description is therefore true to life: it is a noble description and a poetic picture which a painter might reproduce successfully. Poetry, painting, good taste, and truth are all united for Racine and against the Abbé de Bernis' critique.

But if we were taught at *Louis le Grand* to notice all the beauties of this passage of Racine's tragedy, we were also told that they were out of place in the mouth of Theramène, and that Thésée would have had some excuse for stopping him and saying: "Enough of my son's chariot and horses; tell me about him." It was not thus, the celebrated Porée told us, that Antilochus announced the death of Patroclos to Achilles. Antilochus approaches the hero with tears in his eyes, and tells him the terrible news in a few words: "Patroclos is no more. They are fighting for his body. Hector has his armour." There is more of the sublime in these two lines of Homer than in

all the pompous declamation of Racine. “Achilles, you have no longer a friend, and your armour is lost.” At these words we all feel that Achilles must rush into the fray. When a passage sins against truth and propriety, it is not beautiful, either in tragedy or in epic. The details in Racine’s lines would only be suitable in the mouth of a poet describing the death of one of his heroes.

So our learned professor of rhetoric taught us. He possessed both taste and intelligence, and it might be said of him that he was the “last of the Greeks.” But this Philopoemen fell into the same mistake as people make to-day: he filled his works too full of cleverness, and kept his taste for other people’s works.

To return to the Abbé de Bernis. Did he only wish to maintain that Racine’s description was out of place? That is exactly what Father Porée taught us thirty or forty years ago. Or did he wish to hold up the passage I have quoted as an example of bad taste? That is an original idea, but is it justified?

I am told that there are many well-expressed and well-reasoned passages in the Abbé de Bernis’ discourse: you are more likely to know this than I, as you always take the opportunity of hearing such things. If it happens the Abbé de Bernis’ discourse does not contain the offending passage I have just spoken of, and I have received an imperfect account of it, that will make another instance of the utility of a letter for the use of those who hear and speak.

Wherever the language of signs is to be seen, whether in a line of poetry or on an obelisk, whether in a work of imagination or of mystery, it requires a high degree of imagination and penetration to understand it. But if it is so difficult to understand poetry, why is it not more difficult to write poetry? I shall be told that “everyone writes poetry,” but I shall reply, “Hardly anyone writes poetry.” Every imitative art has its own alphabet of signs, and I much

wish some man of taste and intelligence would make a study of them and compare them. The beauties of one poet have oftentimes been compared with those of another. But one task is still unattempted — to collect the beauties of poetry, painting and music, and show their analogies with one another; to explain how the poet, the painter and the musician will express the same idea; to seize upon their most fleeting images of expression and examine the likeness, if there is a likeness, between the imagery of the different arts. I should advise you to add this as a chapter to your *Fine Art reduced to a Single Principle*, and I should also like you to include, at the beginning of your book, a chapter to define in what the beauty of nature consists. [Diderot used to call Batteux' book a *headless* book, because after he had reduced all the fine arts to a single principle — that of imitating the beauty of nature, — he never explained what the beauty of nature consisted in. — Naigeon, *Mémoires*.] For some people are of opinion that for lack of one of these chapters your treatise is without a firm foundation, and for lack of the other of little practical use. Tell them, sir, the different methods of the arts in treating the same subject, and tell them it is false that nature is only ugly when out of place. They ask me why an old gnarled and twisted oak, with its branches lopped, and which I should have felled if it grew near my door, is just the tree a painter would set by my cottage door, if he had to paint it? Is the oak beautiful or ugly? Which is right — the owner or the painter? There is no subject of imitative art which does not arouse this and other difficulties. They also want to know why a scene which is admirable in a poem is not at all suitable for a painting? In those fine lines of Virgil:

> Interea magno misceri murmure pontum
> Emissamque hiemem sensit Neptunus, et imis
> Stagna refusa vadis; graviter commotus et alto
> Prospiciens, summa placidum caput exiulit unda;
> [Meantime the turmoil of the main
> The Tempest loosened from its chain;

The waters of the nether deep
Upstarting from their tranquil sleep
On Neptune broke: disturbed he hears,
And, quickened by a monarch's fears,
His calm broad brow o'er ocean rears.
Æneid, lib. i, v. 128 (*trs.* Conington).]

they ask why it is the painter cannot seize the striking moment when Neptune raises his head above the waves? Why should the god, who then looks like a decapitated man, cut such a poor figure on the water, when the effect in the poem was so impressive? Why is it that what appeals to our imagination in poetry will not please our eyes when painted? Perhaps there is one beauty of nature for the painter and another for the poet? Heaven knows what conclusions they will draw from this theory. I hope you will deliver me from these busybodies; meantime, I am going to give you a single example of the imitation of one subject in nature by poetry, painting and music.

The subject is a dying woman. The poet will say:

Illa, graves oculos conata adtollere, rursus
Deficit. Infixum stridit sub pectore vulnus
Ter sese adtollens cubitoque adnixa levavit;
Ter revoluta toro est oculisque errantibus alto
Quæsivit cœlo lucem, ingemuitque reperta;
[The dull eyes ope, as drowned by sleep,
Then close; the death wound gurgles deep
Thrice on her arm she raised her head,
Thrice sank exhausted on the bed.
Stared with blank gaze aloft, around
For light, and groaned as light she found.
Virgil, Æneid, lib. iv, v. 688 (t*rs.* Conington).]

or

Vita quoque omnis Omnibus e nervis atque ossibus exsolvatur.

[And life break wholly up out of all the sinews and bones.
Lucretius, de Rerum Nat., lib. i, vv. 810, 811.]

The musician will begin by descending a semitone (a): Illa, graves oculos conata adtollere, rursus deficit; then he will go up a fifth, and after a rest, by the still more difficult interval of a tritone (b).

Ter sese adtollens will go up a semitone (c): *Oculis errantibus alto quœsivit cœlo lucem.* This little interval will express the ray of light.



Fig. 8.

This is the dying woman's last effort. After this she will sink by scale (d): Revoluta toro est. She will expire at last, and breathe her last by an interval of a semitone (e): Vita quoque omnis omnibus e nervis atque ossibus exsolvatur. Lucretius expresses the dying away of her strength by the weight of the two spondees — exsolvatur; and the musician will express it

by two minims, tied (f): and the cadence on the second of the minims will give a very striking imitation of the vacillating motion of a dying lamp.

Now look at the painter's method of expression, and you will recognise the exsolvatur of Lucretius in the legs, the right arm, and the left hand. The painter who can express but a moment in time has not been able to represent so many symptoms of dissolution as the poet, but they are much more affecting; the painter shows us reality, whereas the expressions of the poet and the musician are but symbols. When the musician is an artist, the accompaniment either emphasises and strengthens the melody, or brings in new ideas which the subject demands and which the melody cannot express. Thus the first bars of the bass express a gloomy harmony, made up by a superfluous chord of the seventh, placed as it were outside the ordinary rules and followed by another chord, discordant in sound and of a diminished fifth (g). The rest will consist of a series of minor sixths and thirds (h), which are descriptive of exhaustion of strength and prepare the mind for its total extinction.

It is the equivalent of Virgil's spondees:

> Alto quaesivit cœlo lucem

This is but the rough sketch, which I leave for a more accomplished hand to complete. I make no doubt that, in this very subject I selected, instances could be found in our painters, poets, and musicians which would offer more and more striking analogies between the different arts. But I leave it to you, sir, to look for them and utilise them, for you must be painter and poet, philosopher and musician; for you would not have attempted to reduce the fine arts to a single principle, if you had not been equally well acquainted with them all.

The poet and the orator gain by studying harmony of style, and the musician finds his compositions are improved by avoiding certain chords

and certain intervals, and I praise their efforts; but at the same time I blame that affected refinement which banishes from our language a number of vigorous expressions. The Greeks and Romans were strangers to this false refinement, and said what they liked in their own language, and said it as they liked. By overrefining we have impoverished our language; and though there may be only one term which expresses an idea, we prefer rather to weaken the idea than to express it by some vulgar word or expression. How many words are thus lost to our great imaginative writers, words which we find with pleasure in the pages of Amyot and Montaigne! They were at first rejected from a refined style, because they were commonly used by the people; later on they were rejected by the common people, who always ape their betters, and they are become entirely obsolete.

I believe we shall soon become like the Chinese, and have a different *written* and *spoken* language.

This, sir, is almost my last observation; we journeyed on together, and I feel it is time to quit one another. If I detain you for a moment longer as we are leaving this maze in which I have led you, it is but to recapitulate in a few words its turnings and windings.

I believed that, in order to clearly understand the nature of inversions, we should examine the formation of spoken language.

I inferred from this examination (1) that our language was full of inversions when compared with the animal language, or with the first stage of spoken language, when it existed without cases, declensions, conjugations, and syntax; (2) that if we have in French hardly any of what we call *inversion* in ancient languages, this is perhaps due to modern peripateticism, which by realising abstractions gave them the place of honour in speech.

As a consequence of these truths I thought that we could, without studying the origin of spoken language, obtain results by the study of

gesture-language alone.

I suggested two methods of learning the language of gesture — experiments with a "theoretical mute," or long conversations with one born deaf and dumb.

The idea of a theoretical mute, or taking (hypothetically) speech from a man, to get a clearer idea of the formation of language, has led me to consider man as divided into as many distinct and separate entities as he has senses; and I think that if, to form a correct judgment of an actor's intonation, we must listen to him without seeing him, it is natural that we should look at him without listening to him if we are to form a correct opinion of his gestures.

In reference to energetic gesture-language, I related some striking examples of this, which led me to discuss a variety of the sublime which I call *sublimity of situation.*

The order that existed in the gestures of one born deaf and dumb (whose informal conversation seemed to me more valuable than experimenting with a "theoretical mute"), and the difficulty in transmitting certain ideas to this deaf-mute, led me to distinguish in spoken language between those symbols which were first introduced and those of later introduction.

I *saw* that the symbols which in speech denoted indefinite divisions of *quantity* and *time* were among the last to be introduced, and I realised why some languages were without several tenses, and why other languages used one tense with two meanings.

This lack of tenses in one language, and this misuse of tenses in another, led me to distinguish three stages in the formation of a language — its *primitive*, its *formative,* and its *perfected* state.

I saw, when language was formed, that men's minds were hampered by syntax, and by the impossibility of thinking in the order which reigns in Greek and Latin periods. Hence I concluded (1) that, whatever the order of

words in an ancient or modern language, the writer's mind followed the order of French syntax; (2) that, as this syntax is the simplest of all, the French language had the advantage in this and many other respects of the ancient languages.

Moreover, *I proved* by the introduction and the utility of the article *hic* and *ille* in Latin and *le* in French, and by the fact that we have to experience several perceptions simultaneously in order to form a judgment or make a speech, that when the mind is not hampered by Greek and Latin syntax the order of its ideas is not dissimilar to our syntax.

In tracing the transition of language from the formative to the perfected state we *meet with* harmony of style.

I compared harmony of style with musical harmony, and *I am convinced* (1) that the first harmony in words was the result of quantity and a certain combination of vowels and consonants, suggested by instinct; and that in sentences it was the result of the order of words; (2) that this periodic and syllabic harmony produced a sort of language of symbols which is peculiar to poetry; and I then *treated* this symbolic language, and analysed several passages of the greatest poets.

As a result of this analysis I *ventured to maintain* that it is impossible to translate a poet into another language, and that it is an easier thing to understand a geometrician than a poet.

I proved by two examples the difficulty of clearly understanding a poet: by the example of Longinus, Boileau, and La Motte, who misunderstood a passage in Homer; and by the example of the Abbé de Bernis, who seemed to me to misunderstand a passage of Racine.

After I had defined the date when syllabic symbolism was introduced into a language, I *observed* that every imitative art had its own language of signs, and that it would be a good thing if a man of taste and learning would undertake to compare them.

Here I have hinted that this work is expected of you; and that those of us who have read your *Fine Arts reduced to the Imitation of Beauty in Nature* demand that you should define in what beauty in nature consists.

I expect you to compare the language of signs in poetry, painting, and music; meantime, I have ventured to make some observations of my own upon this subject.

Musical harmony, which was necessarily included in the discussion, led my thought to the harmony of speech. I said that the limitations imposed by each were much more supportable than an affected refinement which tends daily to impoverish our language; and I emphasised this point until I came to that passage where I took leave of you.

But do not suppose, from my last observation, that I withdraw my preference for French above all the languages of antiquity and the majority of modern languages. This is still my feeling, and I still think that French is superior in utility (if not in beauty) to Greek, Latin, Italian and English.

The objection may be perhaps raised that if, as I submit, the languages of antiquity and those of our neighbours are superior in beauty, we all know that these languages do not play us false when we wish to treat of ordinary practical matters.

But I make answer that if our language is admirable for its utility, it can also lend itself to the purposes of art. There is no rôle it has not successfully assumed. It has been gay and fanciful with Rabelais, naïve with La Fontaine and Brantôme, musical in Malherbe and Fléchier, sublime in Corneille and Bossuet. What an instrument it is in Boileau, in Racine, in Voltaire, and in a host of other writers of poetry and prose! Do not let us waste our pity on it. If we know how to use it, our works will be as precious in the eyes of posterity as the works of classical antiquity are in our own. In the hands of a commonplace man, Greek, Latin, English and Italian will utter only commonplaces, while the pen of a man of genius will work miracles with

French. Whatever language it is written in, a work inspired and sustained by genius never falls or flags.

On Composition (1755)

Translated by Beatrix L. Tollemache, 1904

(From the "Encyclopædia.")

A PICTURE to be well composed should be a whole regarded from a single point of view; each part should contribute its share to the principal effect, and be related to the parts as the members of a living body are related to each other so as to form a whole; and we may say of a picture, where a great number of figures are dashed on to the canvas without thought or consideration of their relation to each other, that it is no more a true composition than scattered studies of legs, eyes, and noses on one sheet of paper would deserve the name of a portrait, or even of a human figure.

Hence it follows that the painter is subject to the same laws as the poet in his composition, and that the three unities of action, place, and time must be observed as strictly in historical painting as in dramatic poetry. But as the laws of composition are less fixed in paintings which are not historical we shall confine ourselves chiefly to treating of the latter, yet giving incidentally in the course of this article the laws which are to be observed in representing all subjects, whether historical, natural, or poetical.

Of Unity of Time in Painting. — This law is much more stringent for the painter than for the poet. The latter is granted twenty-four hours, that is to say, that he is allowed to put the events which might naturally happen in twenty-four hours into the space of three hours, which is the usual duration of a piece, and he will not be held to have transgressed the laws of probability. But the painter has only one moment which can scarcely be broken into parts, and all the action of his composition must have regard to

this moment: if part of the composition refers to the moment before, or the moment after, he has transgressed the law of unity. When Calchas holds aloft the knife to plunge it into the breast of Iphigenia, the deepest horror, pity, and grief must appear on the countenance of the bystanders. Clytemnestra, furious, will rush to the altar and endeavour, in spite of the soldiers who keep her back, to seize the hand of Calchas, and to place herself so as to shield her daughter; Agamemnon will have his head covered with his cloak, and so on.

In every action it is possible to distinguish a number of different moments to represent, and he would be an unskilful artist who did not choose the most interesting; it will be, according to the subject, the most pathetic, or the most stirring, or the most comic moment, unless the special rules of painting ordain otherwise. But unless he chooses it he will have to make up for the loss of interest by his skilful choice of colours and arrangement of light and shade. The painter sometimes sacrifices the moment of interest to what is too often honoured by the name of *delicate taste,* which will not allow Philoctetes to utter inarticulate cries on the stage, nor to writhe in agony before his cavern, and which banishes many interesting subjects from, painting.

Each moment chosen by the painter has its advantages and disadvantages for him, but once chosen all the rest must follow. Prodicus tells the story that Hercules in his youth, after killing the Erymanthian boar, was met in a lonely spot in the forest by the goddess of Glory and the goddess of Pleasure, who each wished to win him. How many different moments in this moral fable might be chosen by a painter; he might paint from it a whole gallery of pictures. There is the moment when the hero is in the presence of the goddesses; the moment when the voice of Pleasure whispers in his ear; then that when Honour appeals to his feelings; the moment when he is oscillating between the two, honour and pleasure; the moment when

honour begins to preponderate; the moment when he finally decides in her favour.

At the sight of the goddesses he ought to be filled with admiration and astonishment; the voice of Pleasure awakens his softer emotions; that of Honour stirs his nobler feelings; while he is weighing their merits he is dreamy, thoughtful, hesitating; as the mental conflict increases and the moment of sacrifice approaches he is stirred by regret, he is agitated, he is full of uneasiness, and torments lay hold of him; *et fremitur ratione animus*, *vincique laborat.*

The painter who should be so wanting in taste as to choose the moment when Hercules has finally decided in favour of Glory and Honour would lose all the sublimity of this fable, and would be obliged to give a look of sadness to the goddess of Pleasure, who has lost her suit, which would be quite inconsistent with her character. In choosing one moment the painter gives up all the advantages of any other. When Calchas has plunged the sacred knife into the breast of Iphigenia her mother must swoon away; her efforts to avert the blow would belong to a moment that is past; to go back to that moment for a second is to transgress as deeply as to forestall a thousand years hence. Yet there are cases when it is allowable to give not only the actual moment, but also some suggestions of a past time, as when tears of grief are trickling down a face where joy begins to appear. A skilful artist knows how to seize the moment when the feelings are changing from one state to another, and he produces a masterpiece. Such is “Marie de Medicis” in the Luxembourg gallery; Rubens has painted her so as to give the expression of joy at the birth of a son and yet to show traces of the pains of delivery. We may say of these two states of emotion that the one is present and the other is not absent.

As we are rarely anchored in one definite state of feeling, but are tossed about by varying and contrary currents of emotion, it is not sufficient to be

able to represent a simple passion; an artist who can do no more than that will lose many a delicate shade of feeling; his brush will never produce such figures as attract us to look at them again and again, while we seem to find new meanings in them as we study them the more; the passions he paints are too marked to give us this pleasure; they will be more striking at first sight, but will suggest less.

On Unity of Action. — This unity is nearly related to that of time. To grasp two moments is to paint one subject from two different points of view; a fault which is less obvious, but which is really more clumsy than to have two subjects. Two actions, linked together, or even separate, may take place at the same moment in the same place; but two different moments imply a contradiction in one subject unless we choose to consider it a case of two different subjects given on the same canvas. Those poets who do not feel that they have sufficient genius to compose five interesting acts out of a simple subject are fond of fusing several subjects into one, and multiplying episodes, and the less imagination they have the more they cram their piece with actions.

Painters sometimes fall into the same error. No one denies that the principal action will entail secondary ones, but they must be the necessary results of the principal action; we must be able to trace their connection easily and to feel that they are subordinate, and that the spectator is not perplexed by them. You may vary the “Massacre of the Innocents” in any way you please, but wherever I look I must be able to recognize the massacre; the minor episodes may lead me towards the subject or draw me away from it, but the latter result is always a fault. The law of unity of action is even more stringent for the painter than for the poet. A good picture can only give one subject or even one scene for a drama; but one drama may furnish subjects for a hundred different pictures.

On Unity of Place. — This unity is more binding in one way and less in another for the painter than for the poet. The scene is more extensive in painting, but it is only one scene; while the poet, who is not restricted to one moment as the painter is, may lead his hearers from one room to another, the painter, on the contrary, wherever he chooses his scene, whether it be chamber, hall, portico, or out of doors, must there abide. He may, it is true, by means of perspective, enlarge his scene as much as he likes, but he cannot change or wander.

On the Subordination of the Figures. — It is plain that the figures must attract our attention in proportion to the interest they should excite in the spectator; it is also plain that they must each occupy the spot suited to their part in the action, and that each must manifest the proper degree of passion, and if one speaks the others must listen, for to have many persons speaking at the same time has as bad an effect in a picture as in society, and everything being equally perfect in nature, in a perfect picture all the parts should be equally perfectly painted, though not attracting our attention more than their subordinate parts would justify. For, if you had witnessed the sacrifice of Abraham, the bush and the ram would have been as real to you as the sacrificer and his son; let them, therefore, be as real on your canvas, and do not be afraid that these lesser parts will make us neglect to fix our attention on the more important parts. In nature they have not that effect. Why, then, should they produce it when given on your canvas?

On Decorations, *Draperies, and Accessory Details*. — We cannot too much insist on moderation and suitable choice in decorations.

There is in painting as in poetry a fatal exuberance; if you have to paint a manger, why prop it against the ruins of some great building, and erect columns in a spot where my imagination has a difficulty in picturing them? How many pictures have been spoilt by this precept: *beautify nature.* Do not try to beautify nature. Choose carefully the subject which suits you, and

represent it faithfully. In an historical picture let the dress be modern or antique according to the date, and do not give plumed hats to the Jews in a picture of the Crucifixion.

Banish from your composition every unnecessary figure, which, if it does not aid the action, chills it. Do not let your figures be scattered singly here and there, but arrange them in groups; let the groups also be linked together, and let the figures be contrasted, not with the forced contrast of the academical model which the student follows too much instead of observing nature, but let them be thrown up by those behind, and let it be contrived that the parts which are hidden be suggested to the imagination, which should be able to see the whole figure. Let the lights be skilfully arranged to form masses, not spots of light scattered here and there; nor must they be regular ovals, squares, or parallelograms, for such symmetrical forms would be displeasing to the eye when the subject is to be represented picturesquely and not geometrically. Observe the laws of perspective strictly, and take advantage of the folds of draperies to produce effects; you will find that they are very useful if properly managed, but do not let your contrivance be perceived either in this or any other artistic arrangements.

These are the general laws of composition, from which we can hardly deviate without falling into error; but I may add that just as an author may describe an event from the historical or from the poetical point of view, in like manner a painter may treat his subject historically or poetically. In the former case all imaginary creatures, all personified qualities should be banished; history requires truth; such things are not given in the battles of Alexander. In the second case only the well-known allegorical figures should be given, lest we obscure the meaning of the subject which we wish to represent clearly.

A composition may easily be rich in figures yet poor in ideas; another may suggest many ideas and yet represent only one figure. Does not the

presence in a picture of a hermit or of a philosopher absorbed in meditation make us more conscious how solitary is this solitude? If you paint a torrent dashing down a mountain-side, and you wish to increase my feeling of awe, imitate Horace and place a shepherd among the rocks listening with terror to the roaring torrent. We cannot too often urge painters to study the great poets, and poets in their turn to examine the works of the great artists; the former will thus educate their taste and gain noble ideas, the latter will be trained to accuracy and truthfulness. How many descriptions we admire in poetry, which, if translated into painting, would be absurd. There is hardly one of those poems called *Temples* which does not err in that respect. We read these *Temples* with pleasure, but the architect who tries to realize the building as he reads the poet's description usually finds that the reality would be ill-arranged and wanting in beauty.

A painter who loves what is grand, noble, and simple will be especially attracted to Homer and Plato. Everyone knows that Homer is full of scenes studied from nature, but Plato is less known as a master in this way, yet I consider that he is in no wise inferior in this respect to Homer. The introductions to his dialogues are masterpieces of picturesque beauty, and the artist will often find passages in the dialogues which are well worth his study.

My Strange Thoughts on Drawing (1755)

Translated by Beatrix L. Tollemache, 1904

(From the "Encyclopædia.")

NATURE does nothing without reason. Every form, be it beautiful or ugly, has its cause; and of all living beings there is not one which is not as it must necessarily be. Look at that woman who lost her eyes when she was young. The eyelids have not been pressed forward by the growth of the eyeball, and have, therefore, sunk back into the cavity of the eye and become smaller. The eyebrows have been affected by this action of the upper lids, while the cheeks have been slightly drawn upward by the action of the lower lids; the upper lip has been influenced by this and is slightly raised. Every part of the face has been more or less altered as it happened to be nearer or farther from the injured part. Nor was it the face alone which became affected; the throat did not escape, nor the neck and shoulders. Perhaps it is hardly perceptible to your eyes or mine; but compare these outlines with those of another figure; ask nature if there is any difference, and nature will answer, "This is the throat and neck, these are the shoulders of a woman who lost her eyes when she was young."

* * * * *

If I were initiated into the mysteries of art, I should perhaps be able to tell you how far the artist is to follow the strict laws of proportion. But this I know, that Nature overrules them, and that the age and circumstance of the subject oblige us to modify them in a hundred different ways. I never heard that a figure was considered to be badly drawn, when it showed clearly by

its outlines the age, circumstances, and the habitual occupation of the subject, for it is the routine of daily life which puts its impress on every limb, and also on the figure taken as a whole. Thus I may see fitly represented the child, the grown man, the greyhead, the savage, the civilized man, the magistrate, the soldier, and the porter. The hardest thing to draw would be the figure of a man of twenty-five, who had sprung suddenly out of the ground and done nothing as yet; but that man is purely imaginary. Both childhood and old age are, if I may say so, caricatures. The child is a fluid, shapeless mass trying to develop itself; the old man is also shapeless, but dry and tending to reabsorption and annihilation. It is only in the interval between these two extremes, when vigorous manhood begins and until its close, that the artist can follow strictly the outlines before him in all their precision, and that the *poco piu* or *poco meno*, slight individual differences, add or take away from the beauty of form. But you will say, however the age or occupation may alter the form yet the organs remain. Quite so, and, therefore, you must know them; I allow this. And, therefore, it is necessary to study anatomy.

The study of anatomy has its advantages, but the danger is lest the artist should bear it too much in mind, lest he should wish to show off his knowledge, that his eye should be led astray from the outward form, and that in spite of the flesh he should always be thinking of the muscle, of where it springs from, and how it is fixed and joined. He may dwell on all this too much, and become dry and hard and show the muscles too much, even in his female figures.

I am told that anatomy is studied in order to be able to observe nature; but experience shows that, after studying it, it is hard to see Nature as she really is.

You have spent seven years, you say, at the Academy, drawing from models. Do you think they were well spent, and shall I tell you what I think

about it? I believe that in those seven laborious years you learnt *mannerisms* in drawing. All those stiff academical and prearranged positions, all those gestures which a poor fellow has to express coldly and awkwardly (for he is paid by the professor to come three times a week and pose in the nude in the required position), what has all this in common with Nature and its positions and gestures? What is there in common between the man who draws water from the well in your yard, and the man who, not having the same burden, simulates the action and stands with his arms raised on the platform of the studio? What is there in common between the man who pretends to be dying and the man who is really drawing his last breath on his bed, or who is knocked down in the street? What likeness is there between this wrestler in the schools and the fighter in the ring?

Is there anything in common between this model who prays, and sleeps, and reflects, and faints as he is told, and the peasant lying weary on the ground, or the philosopher meditating by his fireside, or the man who sinks fainting in the stifling crowd?

While drawing from the model the imagination becomes filled with false gestures and positions, with cold and lifeless forms; the truth of Nature is forgotten; the artist can think of nothing but the models he has studied. Every time he takes up his pencil or his brush those wretched phantoms rise up before him; he cannot forget them or drive them out of his head. I knew a clever young artist who, before he would draw a line on canvas, used to kneel down and pray, “Good Lord, deliver me from the model.” If nowadays you can rarely see a picture containing groups of figures without recognizing some academical figure, or action, or gesture which is very offensive to a man of taste, and which can only please those who are ignorant of the truth of Nature, you must lay the blame on the constant study of models in the Academy.

The Academy does not teach the general harmony of movements, a harmony which is felt and seen and extends from head to foot. If a woman allows her head to droop forward, all the limbs feel the force of the downward movements.

Again, if she raises her head, all the rest of the body obeys the same impulse.

Yes, it requires skill to pose a model; you should see how proud the professor is of his work, and don't suppose that he would ever think of telling the poor hireling, "My good friend, stand in any posture you like." No, he prefers to put him in some forced attitude than to let him place himself in an easy and natural posture; and yet that is what he should do. I have been tempted a hundred times to say to the students whom I passed on their way to the Louvre, with their portfolios under their arms, "How long have you been studying there? Two years. Well, that is quite long enough. Do give up all that artificial work. Go to Chartreux, and there you will see the real attitudes of devotion and repentance. To-morrow go to the wine-shop, and you will see the true gestures of an angry man. Frequent public places; observe what passes in the streets, in gardens, in markets, in houses, and you will thus learn what are the real gestures in the actions of daily life. Just look at those two companions of yours who are quarrelling; see how the quarrel places them, without their knowing it, in certain attitudes. Examine them carefully, and you will be ashamed of the teaching you get from your insipid professor, and despise the imitation of your vapid model."

How I pity you, my friends, when you find that you must give up all the lies you have learnt, and become simple and truthful like Le Sueur. And yet this is what you must do if you wish to be worth anything.

Attitude is one thing, action is another; every attitude is untrue and trivial; every action is striking and real.

One of the most fatal causes of mannerism is contrast wrongly understood. Contrast should always arise from the springs of action, the different forms produced by character. Look at Raphael and Le Sueur; they sometimes place three, four, or five figures standing side by side, and the effect is sublime. You may observe at mass or at vespers at Chartreux two long parallel rows of monks; the stalls, the occupation, the dress is alike in all, and yet no two monks are alike. Do not strive to give any other contrast than those characteristics which distinguish each of them from his neighbour. This is real contrast; all other is false and mean.

Letter to My Brother (1760)

Translated by Mitchell Abidor, 2005

December 29, 1760

Humani juris et naturalis est unicuique
Quod putaverit, colore, nec alii obest aut
Prodest alterius religio. Sed nec religionis est
Cogere religionemm, quae sponte suscipi debeat
Non vi; cum et hostiae ab animo lubenti
Expostulentur
– Tertul. Aplolog. Ad scapula.

That, dear brother, is what the weak and persecuted Christians said to the idolaters who dragged them to the foot of their altars.

It is impious to expose religion to the odious imputations of tyranny, hardness, injustice, unsociability, even with the design of bringing back to it those who unfortunately had left it.

The spirit can only acquiesce to that which seem to it to be true, the heart can only love that which seems to it to be good. Constraint will make a hypocrite of man if he is weak, a martyr if he is courageous. Weak or courageous, he will feel the injustice of persecution, and he will become indignant.

Instruction, persuasion, and prayer; these are the only methods for the expansion of religion.

Any method that excites hatred, indignation, or contempt is impious.

Any method that awakens the passions and holds to interested views is impious.

Any method that loosens natural ties and distances fathers from children, brother from brother and sister from sister is impious.

Any method tending to raise men up in revolt, to arm nations and to drench the earth with blood is impious.

It is impious to want to impose laws on conscience, the universal rule for action. It must be enlightened and not constrained.

One should feel sorrow for those who err in good faith, not punish them.

Neither men of good or bad faith should be tormented; rather judgment of this should be abandoned to God.

If the tie is broken with those called impious, the tie will be broken with he who is called vicious. This rupture will be recommended to others, and two or three holy personages would suffice to tear society apart.

If we can tear out a hair from he who thinks differently from us we can also dispose of his head, for there are no limits to injustice. It would be interest, fanaticism, the moment or the circumstances that would decide the more or the less.

If an infidel prince were to demand of the missionaries of an intolerant religion how they deal with those who don't believe at all, they would either have to confess to something odious, or lie, or maintain a shameful silence.

What did Christ recommend to his disciples in sending them among the nations? Was it to die or to kill? To persecute or to suffer?

St. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: "If someone comes to you announcing another Christ, proposing to you another spirit, preaching to you another gospel you shall suffer him." Is this what you do with he who announces nothing, proposes nothing. Preaches nothing?

He wrote: "Do not treat as an enemy he who does not have the same sentiments as you, rather warn him like a brother." Is this what you are doing with me?

If your opinions authorize you to hate me, why would my opinions not authorize me to hate you as well?

If you cry out: It is I who have the truth on my side, I will cry out as loudly as you: It is I who have the truth on my side. But I will add: what does it matter who is wrong, you or I, as long as there be peace between us? If I am blind, must you strike a blind man in the face?

If an intolerant being were to clearly explain what he is what corner of the earth wouldn't be closed to him?

We read in Originus, in Minucuis-Felix, in the Fathers of the first three centuries: "Religion is subject of persuasion and not of command. Man must be free in the choice of his cult. The persecutor makes his God hated, the persecutor slanders his religion." Tell me if it was ignorance or deception that invented these maxims?

In an intolerant state the prince will be naught but the paid executioner of the priest.

If it were enough to publish a law in order to have the right to punish, there would not exist a tyrant.

There are circumstances in which one is as convinced of error as of truth. This can only be contested by he who has never sincerely erred.

If your truth proscribes me, my error, which I take for the truth, proscribes you.

Cease to be violent, or cease to reproach pagans and Muslims for violence.

Is it the spirit of God that inspires you when you hate your brother and preach hatred to your sister?

Christ said: 'My kingdom is not of his world,' and you, his disciple, want to tyrannize this world.

He said: "I am gentle and humble of heart." Are you gentle and humble of heart?

He said; “Blessed are the good-natured, the peaceful and the forgiving.” In good conscience, do you deserve this benediction? Are you good-natured, peaceful, and forgiving?

He said: “I am the lamb brought uncomplainingly to the slaughter.” Are you ready to take up the butcher’s knife and slaughter he for whom the lamb’s blood was spilled?

He said: “If you are persecuted, flee.” Yet you chase those who you let speak and who ask else than to peacefully graze at your side.

He said: “You want me to make the fires of heaven rain down on your enemies.” You know what spirit animates you.

Listen to St. John: “My children, love each other.”

St. Athanasius: “If they persecute, this alone is manifest proof that they have neither piety nor fear of God. It is the essence of piety not to constrain, but to persuade in the path of imitation of the Savior, who allowed to each the freedom to follow him. Since the devil doesn’t possess the truth, he comes with hatchets and axes.”

St John Chrysostomos: “Jesus Christ asks his disciples if they want to go forth as well, for these should be the words of he who never did violence.”

Salvien: “Those men are in error, but they are so without knowing it. They are wrong among us, but not amongst themselves. They consider themselves such good Catholics that they call us heretics. That which they are in our eyes, we are in theirs. They err, but with good intentions. What will their future sort be? Only the judge knows. In the meanwhile, he tolerates them.”

St. Augustine: “Let them mistreat you, they who know not with what difficulty the truth is found, and how hard it is to guarantee oneself against error. Let them mistreat you, they who know not how rare and difficult it is to overcome the phantoms of the flesh. Let them mistreat you, they who know not how much one must groan and sigh in order to understand

something of God. Let them mistreat you, they who have not fallen into error."

St. Hilarion: "You make use of constraint in a cause where reason alone is needed. You use force where only enlightenment is needed"

The constitutions of Pope St. Clement: "The savior has allowed men the use of their free will, not punishing them with a temporal death, but assigning them another world in which to render accounts for their actions."

The Fathers of a Council of Toledo: "Do not do violence to anyone in order to bring him to the faith. For God has pity on who he wills, and he hardens whoever it pleases him to do so."

Volumes could be filled with these forgotten quotations.

St. Martin repented his entire lifetime for having communicated with the persecutors of heretics.

Wise men disapproved the violence the Emperor Justinian did to the Samaritans.

Those writers who advised penal laws against unbelief were detested.

Lately, the apologist for the revocation of the Edict of Nantes was taken for a blood-soaked man, as one with whom one should not stay under the same roof.

What is the voice of humanity? Is it that of the persecutor who strikes, or the persecuted who groans?

If an infidel prince has an incontestable right to his subjects' obedience, a disbelieving subject has the incontestable right to his prince's protection: this is a reciprocal obligation.

If authority punishes an individual whose obscure conduct signifies nothing, what will fanaticism not undertake against a sovereign whose example is so powerful?

Does charity demand that the small be tormented and the great spared?

If the prince says that the unbelieving subject is not worthy of life, should it not be feared that the subject will say that the unbelieving prince is not worthy to rule?

Look upon the logical conclusion of your principles and tremble.

Here, dear brother, are a few ideas I have gathered and that I forward to you. Think about them and you will abdicate an atrocious system that is appropriate neither to the uprightness of your spirit nor the goodness of your heart.

Work on your salvation, pray for mine, and believe that all that you will permit yourself beyond this is an abominable injustice in the eyes of God.

Freedom of Thought (1765)

Translated by Mitchell Abidor, 2005

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FREEDOM OF THOUGHT: (*Moral*) This term, *freedom of thought,* has two meanings, one general and the other limited. In the first it signifies that generous strength of spirit that binds our beliefs solely to truth. In the second it expresses the only effect that, according to strong spirits we can expect from free and exact examination, I mean unbelief. As much as the one is praiseworthy and is deserving of applause, the other is worthy of being combated. True *freedom of thought* maintains the spirit on the alert against prejudices and precipitation. Guided by that wise Minerva it only gives the dogmas proposed to it a degree of adherence proportional to their degree of certainty. It firmly believes those that are evident and it classifies as probabilities those that aren't. There are some about which it holds its belief in a state of equilibrium, but if the marvelous is added to them it believes in them less; it begins to have its doubts and distrusts the charms of the illusion. In a word, it only surrenders to the marvelous after fully protecting itself against the rapid slope that that leads us to it. Above all, it gathers all its strength against the prejudices concerning religion that our childhood education leads us to, because these are the ones we undo with the most difficulty. A trace of them always remains, even after we have distanced ourselves from them. Worn out by being left to our own devices, an influence stronger than ourselves compels us return to them. We change fashion and language; there are a thousand things about which we unknowingly grow accustomed to thinking about differently than we did in

our childhood. Our reason willingly takes on these new forms. But as far as it is concerned the ideas that it has formed about religion are respectable. It rarely dares to examine them, and the impression that they have made on the man when still a child ordinarily only die along with him. There is nothing in this to be surprised about; the importance of the matter, together with the example of our parents – who we see truly persuaded about this – are more than sufficient reasons to engrave them in our hearts in such a way that it is difficult to erase them. The first traits that their hands imprint on our souls always leave profound and durable impressions. Such is our superstition that we think we honor God by the hindrances we place before our reason. We are afraid to reveal ourselves to ourselves, to catch ourselves in an error, as if the truth should be afraid to appear in broad daylight.

I am far from concluding that as a result of this we should decide the questions that are concerned with faith alone in the tribunal of proud reason. God has not abandoned to our discussions mysteries that, if subjected to speculation, would appear to be absurdities. He has placed insurmountable barriers to our efforts in the order of revelation. He has marked a point where evidence ceases to shine for us, and this point is reason's term. But where it ends faith begins, which has the right to demand perfect assent by the spirit to those things it doesn't understand. But this submission of blind reason to faith does not, for all that, shake the foundations or overturn the limits of knowledge. And then? If this doesn't take occur in maters of religion – this reason, which some people so loudly decry – we would have no right to ridicule the ceremonies, the opinions, and the extravagant ceremonies we note in all religions except the true one. Who doesn't see that this would mean opening a vast field to the most extreme fanaticism and the most foolish superstitions? With such principles there is nothing we don't believe in, and the most monstrous opinions, the shame of humanity, would be adopted. Is not religion, which is their honor, and which

distinguishes us from beasts, is it not the thing in which men seem the least reasonable? We are strangely made: we are unable to keep ourselves on the middle way. If we aren't superstitious we are impious. It appears we can't be docile in reason and faithful in philosophy. I won't decide here which of the two is more unreasonable and more harmful to religion, superstition or unbelief. Whatever the case, the limits placed on the one and the other suffered less from the daring of the sprit than from the corruption of the heart. Superstition has become impiety and impiety itself has become superstitious. Yes, in all religions of the world *freedom of thought*, which is insulting to good believers, as well as weak souls, superstitious spirits, and servile intelligences, is sometimes more credulous and more superstitious than is thought. What use do I see reason being put to in those men who believe on authority that we shouldn't believe based on authority? What are most of those children who glory in not having a religion? To hear them speak, they are the only sages, the only philosophers worthy of the name. They alone possess the art of examining the truth; they alone are capable of maintaining their reason in perfect equilibrium, which can only be destroyed under the weight of proof. All other men, lazy spirits, servile and cowardly hearts, crawl under the yoke of authority and allow themselves to be dragged along without reticence by received opinion. But how many in their society do we not see who allow themselves to be subjugated by a cleverer child. Let one of those happy geniuses be found among them whose lively and original wit is capable of setting the tone; let that enlightened wit give itself over to unbelief because it was the dupe of a corrupted heart and this strong, vigorous and dominant imagination will exercise an even more despotic power over their sentiments, and a secret penchant towards *freedom* will loan a new strength to his victorious reasons. It will make him pass his enthusiasms on to young imaginations,

will weaken them, will bend them to his will, will subjugate them, will overturn them.

The treatise on *freedom of thought* by Collins passes among the unbelievers as the masterpiece of human reason, and the young unbelievers hide themselves behind this redoubtable volume as if it were under Minerva's aegis. In this book all that is good in the words *freedom of thought* is abused in order as to reduce it to irreligion, as if any free search for truth must necessarily lead to this. This means supposing that which must be proved, i.e., that distancing oneself from generally received opinions is a distinctive characteristic of a reason enslaved to evidence alone. Laziness and blind respect for authority are not the sole hindrances to the human spirit. Corruption of the heart, vainglory, the ambition to build oneself up as the leader of a party only too often exercise a tyrannical power over our souls, which they violently turn away from pure love for the truth.

It is true that unbelievers are and can't help but be imposing, given the list of great men among the ancients who according to them have distinguished themselves by *freedom of thought:* Socrates, Plato, Epicurus, Cicero, Virgil, Horace, Petronius, Cornelius Tacitus. What names for he who respects talent and virtue! But is this logic the right one to get us to think freely? In order to show that these illustrious ancients thought freely it suffices to cite a few passages in their writings where they rise above vulgar opinion, above the gods of their countries. Doesn't this suppose that the *freedom of thought* is the prerogative of unbelievers, and consequently supposes what must be proved. We don't say that in order to persuade oneself that these great men of antiquity were entire free in their researches one must have penetrated the secret movements of their hearts, about which their works cannot possibly give us sufficient knowledge, that if the unbelievers are capable of this incomprehensible force of penetration they are quite clever. But if they aren't it is clear that by a coarse sophism, which

supposes as obvious what is in question, they want us to commit to respect as excellent models so-called sages whose interior is as unknown to them as it is to the rest of men. This way of reasoning would put on trial all the honest men who have written for or against any system at all, and would accuse of hypocrisy, in Paris, in Rome, in Constantinople, in all places on earth and at all times, those who have been the honor of nations in the past and the present. But what angers us is that an author doesn't content himself with giving us as models of *freedom of thought* some of the most famous sages of paganism, but that he also places before our eyes inspired writers, and that he imagines he proves that they thought freely because they rejected the dominant religion. The prophets, he says, condemned the sacrifices offered by the people of Israel, thus the prophets were the patrons of *freedom of thought.* Could it be possible that he who writes this was so distinguished in unbelief or ignorance as to believe that these holy men wanted to turn the people of Israel from the levitical cult? Is it not more reasonable to interpret their sentiments by their conduct and to explain the irregularity of some of their expressions either by the vehemence of oriental languages – which don't always submit to the precision of ideas – or by a violent feeling of indignation inspired in holy men by the abuses of the precepts of a holy religion committed by corrupted peoples? Is there no difference between the man inspired by his God and the man who examines, discusses, and reflects in tranquility and with a cool head?

We can't deny that there were and are among the unbelievers men of the first merit; that their works show intelligence, judgment, knowledge in a hundred places; that they haven't served religion by decrying true abuses; that they haven't forced our theologians to become more learned and circumspect, and that they haven't infinitely contributed in establishing the sacred spirits of peace and tolerance among men. But it must also be agreed that there are many about whom we can ask, along with Swift: "Who would

have suspected their existence if religion, that inexhaustible subject, hadn't abundantly provided them with wit and syllogisms? What other subject enclosed within the limits of nature and art would have been capable of procuring for them the name of profound authors and having them read? If a hundred pens of this strength had been employed for the defense of Christianity they would have been delivered to eternal oblivion. Who would have ever thought to read their works if their defects hadn't been hidden and buried beneath a strong tincture of irreligion?" Impiety is a great resource for many men. They find in it the talents that nature has refused them. The singularity of the sentiments they affect is a mark less of their superior wit than of a violent desire to be seen. Would their vanity be satisfied if they were the simple approvers of the best demonstrated opinions? Would they content themselves of the subaltern honor of supporting the proofs, or strengthening them with some new reasons? No. The first places are taken, and the second can't satisfy their ambition. Like Caesar they prefer to be the first in a village than the second in Rome; they crave the honor of being the leaders of a party by reviving old errors, or in searching for new quibbles in an imagination that pride renders vivid and fertile.

Maimonides (1765)

Translated by Mitchell Abidor, 2005

L'Encyclopédie, Tome neuvième

NOTE: This entry – excerpted form the longer entry on Judaism – on the greatest of Jewish religious thinkers, one who strove mightily to apply reason to revealed texts, is interesting in several ways. As a biography it is wildly inaccurate, with nearly every event it recounts entirely fictional, and so much omitted that it gives an insufficient idea of the sweep of Maimonides' life – after fleeing Spain due to Muslim fundamentalist persecution he lived in Morocco and Palestine before settling in Egypt – or his importance in the Jewish life of his time in general, and Mediterranean Jewish life in particular. But also important is the (entirely invented) account of his personal relationship with the Muslim philosopher Averroes, himself often considered a precursor of the Enlightenment, an intellectual kinship explored in the film by the American director Jacob Bender "The Wise Men of Cordoba." Maimonides did not, as is stated here, read Greek: his knowledge of Greek philosophy was entirely derived from the translations and commentaries of Arab philosophers, Averroes – the great commentator on Aristotle – among them. They never met, and there was certainly never a question of hiding places, but this article's awareness of the intellectual ties between the two men is noteworthy. Also noteworthy is the fair tone of this piece: Maimonides and his ideas are treated with great seriousness and fairness. Even the men of the Enlightenment were not always free of the ambient anti-Semitism (Voltaire was a particularly egregious example of this), so the tone here, as well as in the entry on Jews and Jewish philosophy and theology, are epochal in their way.

MAIMONIDES (His name was Moses and was the son of Maimon, but he is best known by his father's name: he is called Maimonides; some say he was born in 1133). .. Scaliger maintained that he was the first of the doctors who did more than jest among the Jews, like Diogenes among the Greeks. In fact, he found there was much emptiness in the study of the gemara [Analysis of and commentary upon rabbinic discussions in the Talmud] and regretted the time he had wasted doing this and , applying himself to more solid studies, he meditated much on the Scriptures. He knew Greek; he read the philosophers and especially Aristotle, who he often quoted. He caused

such violent emotions in the synagogues that those of France and Spain excommunicated themselves because of him. He was born in Cordoba in 1133. He bragged of descending from the House of David, as do most Spanish Jews. His father Maimon, judge of his nation in Spain, counted among his ancestors a long series of individuals who had successively possessed that charge. It is said that in a dream he was told to break the resolution he had taken to be celibate and to marry the daughter of a butcher who was his neighbor. Perhaps Maimon faked a dream in order to hide a flirtation that caused him shame and had a miracle intervene in order to color his weakness. The mother died giving birth to Moses and Maimon remarried. I don't know if the second wife, who had several children, hated Moses, or if he had a gloomy and heavy spirit during his youth, as is said. But his father reproached him his birth, beat him on several occasions, and finally drove him from the house. It is said that finding no other shelter than the roof of a synagogue he spent the night there and upon awakening found himself a man of a spirit completely different from what he'd had before. He placed himself under the discipline of Joseph the Levite, son of Megas, under whom he made great progress in a short span of time. The desire to see again his birthplace took hold of him, but upon returning to Cordoba instead of entering his father's house he taught publicly at the synagogue, to the great surprise of the participants. His father, who recognized him, went there, embraced him and received him at his house. Some historians deny the truth of this story, because Joseph son of Megas was only ten years older than Moses. This reasoning is puerile, for a teacher can instruct a disciple who is only twenty. But it is more likely that Maimon himself taught his son and later sent him to study under Averroes, who had a high reputation at the time among the Arabs. This disciple had an exemplary attachment and fidelity to his teacher. Averroes had fallen out of favor because of a new revolution among the Moors in Spain. Abdi Amoumen,

captain of a bandit troupe, who said that he was a direct descendant of Hussain, son of Ali, had dethroned the marabous in Africa and then had entered Spain in 1144, making himself in a short time the master of this kingdom. This doctor sought refuge among the Jews and confided the secret of his hiding place to Maimonides, who preferred to suffer all rather than reveal the place in which his teacher was hiding. Abulfaraj even says that Maimonides changed his religion and became a Muslim until, putting his affairs in order, he went to Egypt to live in freedom. His friends denied this, but Averroes, who wanted his soul to be with that of the philosophers, because Mohammedanism was the religion of piglets, Judaism that of children, and Christianity impossible to observe, hadn't inspired a great attachment to the law on the part of his disciple. In any case, a Spaniard who went to persecute this doctor in Egypt until the end of his life reproached him for this weakness with such disdain that the affair was brought before the Sultan, who judged that anything that is done involuntarily and by violence in the matter of religion counts for nothing, from which he concluded that Maimonides had never been a Muslim. Nevertheless, this meant condemning him and deciding against him at the same time as it seemed to absolve him, for he declared that the abjuration was true but exempt from crime since will had played no part. But there is reason to suspect that Maimonides did abandon his religion based on his loose morality on this subject, for not only did he permit the Noahides to fall into idolatry if necessity demanded, because they had received no order to sanctify the name of God, but he maintained that there is no sin in sacrificing with idolaters and in renouncing religion, as long as it isn't done in the presence of ten people, for in that case one must rather die than renounce the law. But Maimonides believed that believed that this sin ceases when it is committed in secret (Maimon. *Fundum. Leg. Cap. V*). The maxim is interesting, for it is no longer the religion that must be loved and

defended at the risk of life; it's the presence of ten Israelites that must be feared and which alone make it a crime. There is reason to believe that interest dictated so bizarre a maxim to Maimonides, and that having secretly abjured Judaism he thought to ease his conscience and defend himself through this distinction. Whatever the case, Maimonides remained in Egypt the rest of his days, which led to his being called Moses the Egyptian. He was a long time without employment there, so that he was reduced to the trade of jeweler. Nevertheless, he never tired of studying, and he finished his commentary on the mishnah that he had begun in Spain at the age of twenty-three. Alfadel, son of Saladin, having returned to Egypt after having been driven out by his brother, knew of Maimonides' merit and chose him as his doctor and provided him with a pension. Maimonides says that this employment occupied him absolutely, for he was obliged to go to the Court every day and to remain there for a long period if someone was sick. Returning home he found a large number of people who had come to consult with him. Nevertheless, he continued to work for his benefactor, for he translated Avicenna, and in Bologna we can yet see this work done by order of Alfadel in 1194.

The Egyptians were jealous upon seeing Maimonides so powerful at court. In order to wrest this from him the doctors demanded a sample of his art. To this effect they presented him with a glass of poison that he swallowed, without fearing the effect, since he had the counter-poison. But having obligated ten doctors to swallow the poison they all died, for they didn't have the specific antidote. It is also said that other doctors placed a glass of poison next to the Sultan's bed to persuade him that Maimonides wanted to take his life and he was forced to slit his veins. But he had learned that in the human body there is a vein that the doctors didn't know and, this not being cut, the complete effusion of blood could not occur. He

saved himself through this unknown vein. This circumstance is not in accordance with the story of his life.

In fact, not only did he protect his nation at the Court from the new Sultans who established themselves on the ruin of the Aliites, but he founded an academy in Alexandria where a great many disciples came from the depths of Egypt, Syria and Judea in order to study under him. There would have been many more if a new persecution in the east hadn't prevented foreigners from getting there. It was so violent that a portion of the Jews were forced to become Mohammedans in order to protect themselves from poverty, and Maimonides – who wasn't able to inspire firmness in them – found himself reduced, like many others, to play the role of the false prophet and to promise his fellow-believers a deliverance that never came. He died at the beginning of the XIII Century and ordered that he be buried in Tiberias, where his ancestors had their tomb.

The doctor composed a great number of works; he commented on the mishnah [The core text of the Talmud which gemara is a commentary on.]; thanks to his strong hand he was the judge of doubtful questions. It is claimed that he wrote on medicine as well as theology, and in Greek as well as Arabic, but that these books are very rare or lost. He is accused of having held the kaballah in contempt until his old age, but that upon then finding a man in Jerusalem who was able in that science he applied himself to the study of it. Rabbi Chaim assures that he saw a letter from Maimonides that testifies to his sorrow at not having penetrated the mysteries of the Law, but it is believed that the kaballists supposed that letter in order not to have been despised by the man who is called the Light of the East and the West.

His works were received with much applause. Nevertheless, it must be confessed that he often had quite arbitrary ideas and, having studied metaphysics, he made too great use of it. He maintained that all the faculties were a dream; he imagined that in this way he much more clearly explained

the Divinity's operations and the expressions of the Scriptures. Is it not strange, he said, that we admit what some doctors said, that an angel enters a woman's womb in order to from an embryo, while these same doctors assure us that an angel is a consuming fire instead of recognizing that the generative faculty is an angel? It's for this reason that God often speaks in the Scriptures and says: *let us make a man in our image*, for a few rabbis had concluded from this passage that God had a body, though more perfect than ours; he maintained that the image signifies the essential form that constitutes a thing in its being. All of this is quite subtle, doesn't remove the difficulty and doesn't reveal the true meaning of God's words. He believed that the stars are animated and the celestial spheres alive. He said that God only repented of one thing, of having confounded the good and the evil in the ruin of the First Temple. He was persuaded that the promises of the Law, which still remained good, regard only a temporal felicity and that they will be fulfilled under the reign of the messiah. He maintained that the Kingdom of Judah had been given to Jechonias' posterity in the person of Saltiel, though Saint Luke positively assures us he was not the son of Jechonias, but of Neri.

Rameau's Nephew (1774)

Translated by Ian C. Johnston of Malaspina University-College, Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada, 2002

Original French Title: 'Le neveu de Rameau'

This major dialogue was written between 1761 and 1774, but not published until 1805 in a German translation by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. The French manuscript had then disappeared and so the German version was translated back into French by de Saur and Saint-Geniès and published in 1821. The first published version based on the French manuscript appeared in 1823 in the Brière edition of Diderot's works. Modern editions are based on the complete manuscript in Diderot's own hand, which was discovered by Georges Monval, the librarian at the Comédie-Française in 1890, while buying music scores from a second-hand bookshop in Paris. Monval published his edition of the manuscript in 1891. Consequently, the manuscript was bought by the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York.

The dialogue takes place in the Café de la Régence, where Moi (Me), a narrator-like persona (often mistakenly supposed to stand for Diderot himself), describes for the reader a recent encounter he has had with the character Lui (Him), referring to — yet not literally meaning — Jean-François Rameau, the nephew of the famous composer, who has engaged him in an intricate battle of wits, self-reflexivity, allegory and allusion. Lui goes on to defend a worldview based on cynicism, hedonism and materialism. Recurring themes in the dialogue include the *Querelle des Bouffons* (the French/Italian opera battle), education of children, the nature of genius and money. The conversation also pokes fun at numerous

prominent figures of the time. Some of the principal concerns of *Le neveu de Rameau* are the consequences of God's non-existence for the possibility of morality and the distinction between human beings and animals.



Johann Wolfgang von Goethe by Joseph Karl Stieler, 1828



Portrait of Denis Diderot by Louis-Michel van Loo, Louvre Museum, 1767

RAMEAU'S NEPHEW



Vertumnis, quotquot sunt, natus iniquis
(Horat., Lib. II, Satyr. VII)
[Born under every changeful star]

NO MATTER WHAT THE WEATHER, rain or shine, it's my habit every evening at about five o'clock to take a walk around the Palais Royal. I'm the one you see dreaming on the bench in Argenson's Alley, always alone. I talk to myself about politics, love, taste, or philosophy. I let my spirit roam at will, allowing it to follow the first idea, wise or foolish, which presents itself, just as we see our dissolute young men on Foy's Walk following in the footsteps of a prostitute with a smiling face, an inviting air, and a turned-up nose, then leaving her for another, going after all of them and sticking to none. For me, my thoughts are my prostitutes.

If the weather is too cold or too rainy, I take refuge in the Regency Café. I like to watch the games of chess. The best chess players in the world are in Paris, and the best players in Paris are in the Regency Café. Here, in Rey's establishment, they battle it out — Legal the Profound, Philidor the Subtle, Mayot the Solid. One sees the most surprising moves and hears the stupidest remarks. For one can be an intelligent man and a great chess player, like Legal, but one can also be a great chess player and a fool, like Foubert and Mayot.

One day I was there after dinner, looking on a great deal but not saying much, listening as little as possible, when I was accosted by one of the most bizarre people in this country (and God has made sure we don't lack such types). He is a mixture of loftiness and depravity, of good sense and buffoonery. The notions of honesty and dishonesty must be really badly confused in his head, for he shows without ostentation that nature has given

him fine qualities, and has no shame in revealing that he has also received some bad ones. Beyond that, he's endowed with a strong constitution, a remarkably warm imagination, and an extraordinary lung power. If you ever meet him and his originality does not hold your attention, you'll either put your fingers in your ears or run off. God, what terrible lungs!

Nothing is more unlike him than himself. Sometimes he is thin and haggard, like an invalid in the final stages of consumption. You can count his teeth through his cheeks. You'd say he'd spent several days without a meal or had just left a Trappist monastery. The next month, he's sleek and plump, as if he'd been eating steadily at a banker's table or had been shut up inside a Bernadine convent. Today, in dirty linen and torn trousers, dressed in rags, almost barefoot, he slinks along with his head down. One is tempted to call to him to give him a hand out. Tomorrow, he marches along with his head high, powdered, his hair curled, well dressed, with fine shoes. He shows himself off, and you'd almost take him for a gentleman. He lives from day to day, sad or happy, according to circumstances. His first concern in the morning, when he gets up, is to know where he'll have lunch. After lunch, he thinks about where he'll go for supper.

Night time also brings uncertainties. Should he return on foot to the little garret where he lives, assuming that the caretaker, in her irritation at not getting the rent, has not asked him to return his key, or should he settle for a working-class tavern to wait for daylight over a slice of bread and a mug of beer? When he hasn't got even six pennies in his pocket, which happens sometimes, he resorts to one of his friends who drives a cab or the coachman of a noble lord who gives him a pallet in the straw beside the horses. In the morning there are still bits of his mattress in his hair. If the season is mild, he paces all night along the Cours or the Champs Élysées. He reappears in town with the dawn, dressed up for today in yesterday's clothes, and dressed up today perhaps for the rest of the week.

I don’t think much of these eccentrics. Some people turn them into familiar acquaintances, even friends. Once a year they interest me, when I meet them, because their character stands in contrast to others and they break that fastidious uniformity which our education, our social conventions, and our habitual proprieties have introduced. If one of them appears in company, he’s a grain of yeast which ferments and gives back to everyone some part of his natural individuality. He shakes things up. He agitates us. He makes us praise or blame. He makes the truth come out, revealing who has value. He unmasks the scoundrels. So that’s the time a man with sense pays attention and sorts his world out.

The man I’ve described I knew from some time back. He used to hang about a house where his talent had opened doors for him. There was an only daughter. He swore to the father and mother that he would marry their daughter. They shrugged their shoulders and laughed in his face, telling him he was mad. I saw it happen. He used to ask me for money, which I gave him. He got himself introduced, I don’t know how, into some good homes, where he had a place for dinner, but on condition he didn’t speak without first getting permission. He kept silent and ate in anger. It was really good to see him under this constraint. If he was seized by a desire to break this agreement and opened his mouth, with his first word all the guests would cry out “O Rameau!” Then his fury would burn in his eyes, and he’d go back to his meal even more enraged.

You were curious to know this man’s name, and now you do. He is the nephew of that famous musician who delivered us from the plain song of Lully, which we’ve been chanting for more than a century, and who wrote so much unintelligible visionary stuff and apocalyptic truths about the theory of music, none of which ever made sense either to him or anyone else. He left us a certain number of operas where there is some harmony, scraps of song, some disconnected ideas, noise, flights, triumphal marches,

lances, glories, murmurs, victories that leave one breathless, and dance tunes which will last forever. He buried the Florentine but will now be buried by Italian virtuosi, a fact which he saw coming and which made him gloomy, sad, and surly. For no one, not even a pretty woman who wakes up with a pimple on her nose, is as moody as an author who threatens to outlive his reputation — just look at Marivaux and the younger Crebillon.

He greets me. “Ah, ha, so there you are, Mister Philosopher. What are you doing here in this pile of idlers? Are you also wasting time pushing wood around?” That’s how people speak contemptuously of chess or checkers.

ME: No. But when I don’t have anything better to do, I amuse myself for a bit by watching those who push well.

HIM: In that case you don’t get to enjoy yourself often. Except for Legal and Philidor, the others have no idea about the game.

ME: What about Mr. de Bissy?

HIM: That man plays chess the way Miss Clairon acts. They both know everything about their respective games that one can learn.

ME: You’re harsh. I see you honour only men of genius.

HIM: Yes. In chess, in checkers, poetry, oratory, music and other similar nonsense. What good is mediocrity in things like that?

ME: Not much, I agree. But large numbers of men must work at them before the man of genius appears, one man in a multitude. But let’s drop that subject. It’s been an eternity since I last saw you. I hardly think of you

when I don't see you. But I'm always pleased to see you again. What have you been doing?

HIM: What you, I, and all the other do — some good, some bad — and nothing. Then when I was hungry, I ate when I had a chance. After eating, I was thirsty and I drank sometimes. However, I grew a beard, and when that came, I shaved it off.

ME: You shouldn't have done that. It's the one thing you need to be a wise man.

HIM: That's right. I have a lofty wrinkled forehead, a burning eye, a jutting nose, large cheeks, black bushy eyebrows, a clean-cut mouth, curving lips, a square face. If this vast chin was covered with a long beard, can you imagine how splendid that would look in bronze or marble?

ME: Up there beside Caesar, Marcus Aurelius, and Socrates.

HIM: No. I'd go better between Diogenes the philosopher and Phryne the prostitute. Like one of them I'm impudent, and I happily hang around the houses of the other.

ME: Is your health still good?

HIM: Yes, normally it is. But it's not so marvelous today.

ME: Why's that? There you are with a belly like Silenus and a face...

HIM: A face one might mistake for what's behind the belly. That's because the humour which is making my uncle waste away is apparently making his dear nephew fat.

ME: What about your uncle — do you ever see him?

HIM: Yes — he walks past me in the street.

ME: Hasn't he done anything for you?

HIM: If he's done anything for anyone, he's done it without being aware of what he's doing. The man's a philosopher in his own way. He thinks only of himself. To him the rest of the universe isn't worth a damn. His daughter and his wife might as well die whenever they want. So long as the parish bells which toll for them continue to resonate at the twelfth and seventeenth intervals, all will be fine. That's a good thing for him. And that's what I especially value in people of genius. They are good at only one thing. Other than that, nothing. They've no idea what it is to be citizens, fathers, mothers, brothers, parents, friends. Just between us, we should try to be like them in every way, but without wanting their breed to become something common. We must have men, but men of genius, no. No, my goodness, we don't need them. They're the ones who change the face of the earth. And in the smallest things stupidity is so common and so powerful that no one can reform it without making a great fuss. That sets up, at least in part, what men of vision see. And part remains just as it was. Thus, we have two gospels, the costume of Harlequin. The wisdom of the monk Rabelais is true wisdom, for his own peace of mind and that of others — do one's duty, somehow or other, always speak well of your master the prior, and leave the world to its fantasies. That works well, because the majority is happy with it. If I understood history, I'd show you that evil has always come here below from some man of genius. But I don't know history, because I don't know anything. The devil take me if I've ever learned a thing and if I'm any the worse off for having learned nothing. One day I was at the table of one of the King's ministers who had brains enough for four men. Well, he

demonstrated to us, as clearly as one and one adds up to two, that nothing is more useful to nations than lies, nothing more harmful than the truth. I don't recall his proofs very well, but it evidently follows that people of genius are detestable and that if a child at birth bears on its forehead the characteristics of this dangerous natural gift, one should either smother the child or throw it to the dogs.

ME: But people like that, so hostile to genius, all pretend to have some.

HIM: I'm sure they think that about themselves deep inside, but I don't think they dare admit the fact.

ME: That's just their modesty. So from that point on you've developed a terrible hatred against genius.

HIM: Something I'll never put behind me.

ME: But I've seen the time when you were desperate to be anything but an ordinary person. You'll never be happy if the arguments for and against affect you equally. You have to pick a side and stick to it. I quite agree with you that men of genius are usually odd or, as the proverb states, that there are no great minds without a grain of folly. One can't deny the fact. But we despise the ages which have not produced men of genius, and men will honour those nations among whom genius has lived. Sooner or later, we raise statutes to them and consider them benefactors of the human race. I don't mean to disparage the sublime minister you mentioned to me, but I think that if a lie can be useful momentarily, it is necessarily harmful in the long run, and by contrast, the truth is useful over time, even though it could be harmful at a particular moment. From that I'm temped to conclude that the man of genius who speaks out against a common error or who establishes a great truth is always a being worthy of our veneration. It could

happen that such a being is the victim of prejudice and the law, but there are two kinds of laws, those which are based on equity, which are universally true, and others which are peculiar and derive their authority only from blindness or from the needs of certain circumstances. This second type confers upon the man who breaks them merely a passing ignominy, a shame which time turns back on the judges and countries who condemned him. The shame stays with them for ever. Think of Socrates and the magistrate who made him drink the hemlock — which of those two is the dishonourable man today?

HIM: That's a great help to Socrates! Does that make him any less condemned, any less put to death? Was he any less a rebellious citizen? With his contempt for a bad law, didn't he encourage fools to disregard good laws? Was he any less an audacious and odd individual? Just now you were not so far from expressing how little you liked men of genius.

ME: My dear fellow, listen to me. A society should never have bad laws. And if it had only good ones, it would never be in a position to persecute a man of genius. I didn't say that genius was inseparably attached to malice or malice to genius. A fool is more often an evil person than a man of intelligence is. And if a man of genius were characteristically hard to get along with, difficult, prickly, and unbearable, even if he were bad, what would you conclude from that?

HIM: He should be drowned.

ME: Gently, my dear fellow. Now, tell me — I won't take your uncle as an example. He's a hard man, brutal, inhuman, and miserly. He's a bad father, a bad husband, a bad uncle. And it's by no means clear that he's a man of genius who has pushed his art a long way, so that in ten years we'll be

discussing his works. But what about Racine? He certainly had genius, and he didn't have much of a reputation as a good man. What about Voltaire?

HIM: Don't press me on this question. I can give you an argument.

ME: Which of these two options would you prefer — that Racine had been a good man, known for his business, like Briasson, or for his yardstick, like Barbier, getting his wife regularly pregnant every year with legitimate children, a good husband, a good father, a good uncle, a good neighbour, an honest merchant, but nothing more — or that he had been deceitful, treacherous, ambitious, envious, and nasty, but the author of *Andromache*, *Britannicus*, *Iphigeneia*, *Phedre*, and *Athalie*?

HIM: For him I imagine it would perhaps have been better if he'd been the first of the two.

ME: What you've just said is infinitely truer than you think.

HIM: There you go, you others! If we say something good, it's as if we're mad or inspired — just a fluke. It's only you others who really understand what you're saying. Yes, Mister Philosopher, I understand what I'm saying, and I understand that just as much as you understand what you're saying.

ME: All right, let's see. Why would that have been better for Racine?

HIM: The point is that all these beautiful things he created didn't bring him twenty thousand francs. If he'd been a good silk merchant on Saint Denis or Saint Honore street, a fine wholesale grocer, or a well-connected apothecary, he'd have amassed an immense fortune, and, in the process of getting it, he could've enjoyed no end of pleasures. From time to time he could've given a few coins to a poor foolish devil like myself, who'd have

made him laugh and occasionally procured for him a young woman to relieve the boredom of his eternal co-habitation with his wife. We'd have had some excellent meals at his home, played for high stakes, drunk some fine wines, fine liqueurs, fine coffees, and gone for picnics in the country. You see I know what I'm talking about. You laugh. But let me continue. That would've been better for those around him.

ME: No disagreement there, provided he didn't use the money he got from legitimate business for dishonest purposes and kept far away from his home all gamblers, hangers on, all those self-satisfied tasteless people, all those layabouts, all those useless perverts, and made his shop assistants beat senseless the officious gentlemen who in various ways relieve husbands of the disgust they feel at a never-ending life with their wives.

HIM: Beat senseless, my dear chap, beat up! We don't beat anyone senseless in a well-policed town. Pimping is a respectable profession. Many people, even those with titles, are mixed up in it. And what in the devil do you want us to use our money for, if not for a good table, good company, good wines, fine women, pleasures of all sorts, amusement of all kinds. I'd have no desire to possess a large fortune without these enjoyments. But let's get back to Racine. The man was good only for those he didn't know and for a time when he was no longer alive.

ME: I agree. But weigh the good and bad. A thousand years from now, he'll still make people cry and win men's admiration. In all countries of the world he will inspire humanity, sympathy, tenderness. People will ask who he was, what country he came from, and they'll envy France. He made a few people suffer who are no longer alive and in whom we have hardly any interest. We have nothing to fear from his vices or faults. No doubt it would've been better if nature had given him the virtues of a good man

along with the talents of a great man. He's a tree which has caused some trees planted near him to wither up and has suffocated the plants growing at his feet. But he carried his top right up into the sky — his branches stretched a long way. He provided shade to those who came, who come, and who will come to rest alongside his majestic trunk. He produced fruits with an exquisite taste which replenish themselves continuously. We could also wish that Voltaire had had the sweetness of Duclos, the ingenuousness of Abbé Trublet, the honesty of Abbé d'Olivet. But since that's impossible, let's look at the really interesting side of this issue. Let's forget for the moment the point which we occupy in space and time and extend our vision into the centuries to come, into the most distant regions, into nations yet to be born. Let's think of the well being of our species. If we are not generous enough, let's at least forgive nature for having been wiser than we are. If you throw cold water on Greuze's head, perhaps you will extinguish his talent along with his vanity. If you make Voltaire less sensitive to criticism, he will not know how to descend into the soul of Merope. He will no longer move you.

HIM: But if nature was as powerful as she was wise, why didn't she make those men good in the same way she made them great?

ME: But don't you see that with that sort of reasoning you confound the general order. If everything here below were excellent, then nothing would be excellent.

HIM: You're right. The important point is that you and I exist and that we exist as you and I. Let everything beyond that go ahead however it can. The best order of things, in my view, is one in which I had to exist. Who cares about the most perfect of worlds, if I'm not on it? I prefer to exist, even as an impertinent quibbler, than not to exist at all.

ME: There's no one who doesn't think just as you do and who doesn't put existing order on trial, without noticing he's renouncing his own existence.

HIM: That's true.

ME: So let's accept things as they are. Let's see what they cost us and what they bring us, leaving aside everything we don't know well enough to assign praise or blame — what's perhaps neither good nor bad, but what's necessary, as many respectable people think.

HIM: I don't understand much about that spiel you've just given me. It seems like philosophy, and I warn you I'll not get mixed up in that. All I know is that I'd be quite happy to be someone else, on the off-chance I'd be a genius, a great man. Yes, I have to admit it. There's something there which speaks to me. I've never heard a single genius praised without such tributes to him making me secretly enraged. I get envious. When I learn about some detail of their private lives which demeans them, I listen with pleasure. That brings us closer together, and I bear my mediocrity more easily. I say to myself, "It's true you never could have created *Mahomet*, but you'd never have praised Maupeou." So I've been mediocre, and I'm angry with my mediocrity. Yes, yes, I am mediocre and angry. I've never heard the overture to *Les Indes Galantes* or heard anyone sing *Profonds Abîmes du Ténaire, Nuit, Éternelle Nuit*, without feeling pain and saying to myself, "There's something you'd never create." Hence I was jealous of my uncle, and if at his death there'd been some fine compositions for the keyboard in his portfolio, I wouldn't have hesitated to remain myself and to be him as well.

ME: If that's the only thing bothering you, it's not worth the trouble.

HIM: It's nothing — they're just passing moments.

Then he started to sing the overture to *Indes Galantes* and the song *Profonds Abîmes*, adding, “That something or other inside me which talks to me says, ‘Rameau, you’d love to have composed those two pieces. If you’d done these two, you’d probably have done two others. And when you’d composed a certain number, people would play and sing you all over the place. When you walked along, you’d hold your head high. Your own awareness would confirm your own merit for you. Others would point you out. They’d say ‘There’s the man who wrote those lovely gavottes.’”

He sang the gavottes, and then, looking like a man deeply moved, swimming in joy, his eyes damp, he added, rubbing his hands together, “You’d have a fine house” — he measured its extent with his arms— “a fine bed” — he pretended to stretch himself out on it nonchalantly— “good wines” — which he tasted by smacking his tongue against his palate— “a fine horse and carriage” — he raised his foot as if to climb in— “beautiful women” — he embraced their breasts and gazed at them voluptuously— “A hundred hangers-on would come to sing my praises every day” — he imagined he saw them all around him — Palissot, Poincinet, the two Frérons, father and son, La Porte — he listened to them, he puffed himself up, agreed with what they said, smiled at them, ignored them, scorned them, sent them off, called them back. Then he continued “That’s the way people would tell you every morning that you’re a great man. You’d read in the history of *Trois Siècles* that you were a great man. You’d be convinced in the evening that you were great man, and that great man, Rameau the nephew, would fall asleep to the soft murmur of praise which echoed in his ears. Even while he was sleeping, he would have a satisfied air — his chest would expand, rise, and fall with assurance, and he’d snore like a great man.” As he was saying this, he moved over and lay gently on a bench. He closed his eyes and imitated the happy sleep he’d just imagined. After having enjoyed this relaxed repose for a few moments, he woke up,

stretched his arms, yawned, rubbed his eyes, and looked around him for any dull admirers still there.

ME: So you think that a happy man sleeps like that?

HIM: Do I think so! I'm a poor wretch, and when I go back to my garret in the evening and tuck myself in on my pallet, I'm shriveled up under my coverlet — my chest is tight and my breathing short, like a weak moan that's hardly audible; whereas, a financier makes his apartment reverberate and amazes his entire street. But what bothers me today is not that I sleep and snore meanly like someone destitute.

ME: But that's sad.

HIM: What's happened to me is much worse.

ME: So what is it?

HIM: You've always taken some interest in me because I'm a good little devil whom deep down you despise — but I amuse you.

ME: That's true.

HIM: And I'm going to tell you.

Before beginning, he sighs deeply and puts both hands on his forehead. Then he recovers his calm appearance and says to me: "You know that I'm ignorant — a silly man, a fool — impertinent, lazy, what we Burgundians call an incorrigible crook, a swindler, a thief..."

ME: What a panegyric!

HIM: It's true, all of it. I don't take back a word of it. Let's please not argue about it. No one knows me better than I do, and I'm not saying everything.

ME: I don't want to upset you, so I'll accept everything you say.

HIM: All right. I used to live with people who liked me precisely because I was endowed with all those qualities to an unusual extent.

ME: That's odd. Up to the present I believed that people hid them from themselves or forgave them in themselves and condemned them in other people.

HIM: Hide them from oneself — is that possible? Rest assured that when Palissot is alone and reflects on himself, he tells himself something different. You can be sure that in a tête-à-tête with his colleague, they frankly confess that they are nothing but two outstanding rogues. Despise such defects in others! My people were fairer than that — their character made me a marvelous success in their company. I was in clover. They fêted me. They were sorry every moment I was away from them. I was their little Rameau, there beautiful Rameau, their Rameau the foolish, the impertinent, the ignorant, the lazy, the greedy, the clown, the great beast. There wasn't one of these familiar labels which didn't earn me a smile, a caress, a pat on the shoulder, a slap, a kick, at table a fine morsel tossed onto my plate for me, away from the table a liberty which I tolerated as of no consequence, for I myself was of no consequence. People make of me, with me, and in front of me anything they want, without my taking exception. And all the small presents which showered down on me? I'm such a stupid dog I lost them all! I lost everything because once — the only time in my life — I had common sense. May that never happen to me again!

ME: What was it about?

HIM: It was an incomparable stupidity — incredible, unpardonable.

ME: What stupidity?

HIM: Rameau, Rameau, people didn't accept you for your common sense! The idiocy of having had a little taste, a little intelligence, a little reason. Rameau, my friend, this will teach you to remain the man God made you, the man your patrons wanted you to be. So they grabbed you by the scruff of the neck, marched you to the door, and said: "Imposter, get out. And don't come back. I believe it wants to have some sense, some reason! Beat it. We have these qualities to spare." You went off biting your nails. You should've bitten off your damned tongue long before that. Because you didn't think about it, here you are on the pavement, the ground, with no idea where to go next. You'd been eating high on the hog, and now you'll return to slops; you'd been well lodged, and now you'll be very lucky if they let you have your garret back; you had a nice place to sleep, and now the straw is waiting for you between Mr. de Soubise's coachman and your friend Robbé. Instead of a soft and peaceful sleep, as you used to have, you'll be listening with one ear to the neighing and stomping of horses and with the other to a sound a thousand times more unbearable — dry, hard, and barbarous verse. Miserable, stupid fool, possessed by a million devils!

ME: But isn't there some way to go back? Is the fault you committed unforgivable? In your place, I'd go to find my people again. You're more necessary to them than you think.

HIM: Oh, I'm certain that right now, when they don't have me around to make them laugh, they're bored to death.

ME: Then I'd go get them back. I wouldn't leave them the time to learn to do without me, to turn to some decent amusement. Who knows what could

happen?

HIM: That's not what I'm afraid of. That won't happen.

ME: No matter how wonderful you are, another could replace you.

HIM: That would be difficult.

ME: I agree. However, I'd go back with this dejected face, these wild eyes, this disheveled collar, tousled hair — in the truly tragic state you're in right now. I'd throw myself at the feet of that goddess, stick my face against the earth, and, without getting up, I'd say to her in a low and sobbing voice, "Pardon, madame! Forgive me! I'm unworthy, despicable. That was an unfortunate moment, for you know I'm not subject to having common sense, and I promise you I'll never have it again in my life."

What was amusing was that while I was having this conversation with him, he carried out the pantomime. He threw himself down, stuck his face against the ground, and seemed to hold between his two hands the toe of a slipper. He was crying and sobbing the words, "Yes, my little queen. Yes, I do promise. I'll never have it in my life, never." Then he got up quickly and added in a serious and deliberate tone:

HIM: Yes, you're right. I think that would be best. She's a good woman. Mr. Viellard says that she is so kind. And I know a little bit that she is. Nonetheless, to go humiliate oneself in front of an ugly bitch! To cry for pity at the feet of a miserable little actress who's always followed by the hissing from the theatre stalls! Me, Rameau, son of Mr. Rameau, apothecary of Dijon, a man of means, who's never bent his knee to anyone at all! Me, Rameau, nephew of the man who calls himself the Great Rameau, the man people see walking upright on the Palais Royal with his arms waving in the

air, ever since Mr. Carmontelle made that drawing of him bent over with his hand under the tails of his coat. I, who have composed pieces for the keyboard which no one plays but which may well be the only ones which our posterity finds agreeable enough to play. I, well, I...I would go...but look here, sir, it's impossible.

Then, putting his right hand to his chest, he added, "I feel something there rising up — it says to me, 'Rameau, you'll do none of that.' There must be a certain dignity attached to human nature which nothing can extinguish. The most trivial thing will awaken it — something trifling. There are other days when it would cost me nothing to be as vile as anyone could wish. On those days for a penny I'd kiss the ass of the little Hus girl."

ME: But, my friend, she's white, pretty, young, soft, chubby — it's an act of humility that even a man more refined than you could sometimes stoop to.

HIM: Let's understand each other — there's literal ass kissing and metaphorical ass kissing. Ask fat Bergier who kisses the ass of Madame de La Mark both literally and figuratively — my God, with them the literal and figurative disgust me equally.

ME: If the course of action I'm suggesting doesn't suit you, then have the courage to be a beggar.

HIM: It's hard to be poor, as long as there are so many wealthy idiots one can rely upon for one's living. And then contempt for oneself, that's unbearable.

ME: Do you know that feeling?

HIM: Do I know it? How many times have I said to myself, “How come there are ten thousand fine tables in Paris, each with fifteen or twenty places, and there’s no place for you! There are purses full of gold spilling over left and right, and no piece falls on you! A thousand fine half wits without talent or merit, a thousand tiny creatures without charm, a thousand insipid schemers are well dressed, and you’d walk around naked? In this business how could you be so stupid? Couldn’t you lie, swear, forswear, promise, and then perform or fail to perform, like everyone else? Couldn’t you crawl on hands and knees like the others? Couldn’t you promote a lady’s affair and carry a love letter from a gentleman, like any other man? Couldn’t you encourage this young man to speak to this young lady and persuade her to listen to him, like other men? Couldn’t you tell the daughter of one of our bourgeois that she is badly dressed, that some fine earrings, a little rouge, lace, and a Polish-style dress would make her look ravishing, that those little feet of hers were not made to walk along the road, that there’s a fine gentleman, young and rich, who has a coat trimmed in gold, a superb horse and carriage, and six huge footmen, who saw her passing by and who finds her charming and who, since that day, has lost his desire for food and drink, doesn’t sleep, and will die for her. ‘But what about my father?’ ‘Yes, yes, your father! He will be a little angry at first.’ ‘And what about Mummy? She’s told me so often to be an honest girl. She says there’s nothing in the world but honour’ ‘An ancient saying which doesn’t mean a thing.’ ‘And my father confessor?’ ‘You won’t see him any more. Or if you continue the fairy tale of going to him to tell the story of your amusements, it will cost you some pounds of sugar and coffee.’ ‘But he’s a strict man who has already refused me absolution for singing *Viens dans ma cellule.’* ‘That’s because you didn’t have anything to give him, but when you appear before him in a lace dress...’ ‘Then I’ll have a lace dress?’ ‘There’s no doubt about it, all sorts of them, and diamond earrings.’ ‘So I’ll have

beautiful diamond earrings?' 'Yes.' 'Just like the ones belonging to that marquise who comes sometimes to buy gloves in our shop?' 'That's right. In a fine carriage with dappled gray horses, two large footmen, a small Negro, and a man running in front; you'll have rouge, beauty spots, a train carried behind you.' 'To a ball.' 'To a ball, to the opera, to the theatre.' Her heart is already quivering with joy. You play with a sheet of paper between your fingers. 'What's that?' 'It's nothing.' 'It seem to me to be...' 'It's a letter.' 'For whom?' 'For you, if you are at all curious.' 'Curious? I'm really curious. Let's see it.' She reads. 'A meeting. That's impossible.' 'Perhaps when you are going to mass.' 'Mamma always comes with me. But if he came here early in the morning. I get up first, and I'm at the counter before they get up.' He comes. He is pleasing. One fine day at dusk the girl disappears, and I get paid my two thousand écus. How come you possess such talent and are short of bread. You wretched man, aren't you ashamed?" I remember a group of scoundrels who couldn't hold a candle to me and who were loaded with money. I was in a buckram overcoat, and they were dressed in velvet, leaning on gold-headed canes shaped like ravens' beaks, with pictures of Aristotle or Plato on cameo rings on their fingers. But who were they? For the most part they were incompetent musicians — nowadays a sort of nobility. At the time it gave me courage, raised my spirits, made my mind more subtle, capable of everything. But these happy states of mind apparently didn't last, because up to now I haven't been able to make any headway. Whatever the case, those are the words of my frequent soliloquies, which you can paraphrase however you like, provided you conclude from them that I understand disgust for oneself or the torment of conscience which arises from the uselessness of the gifts given to us by heaven. It's the cruelest thing of all. It would almost be better for a man not to be born.

I listened to him. While he was acting out the scene of the procurer and the young girl being seduced, I was pulled in two opposite directions — I didn't know whether to give in to my desire to laugh or get carried away with anger. I was perplexed. Twenty time a fit of laughter prevented my anger from bursting out — twenty times the anger arising at the bottom of my heart ended in a burst of laughter. I was taken aback by so much cleverness and base behaviour, by such valid ideas alternating with false ones, by such a general perversity of feeling and such complete depravity and such rare frankness. He noticed the conflict going on inside me. "What's the matter with you?" he said.

ME: Nothing.

HIM: You seem upset.

ME: Well, I am.

HIM: What do you think I should do?

ME: Change the subject. You poor man, to be born or fall into such a debased condition.

HIM: I agree. However don't let my condition affect you too much. In revealing myself to you I didn't mean to cause you distress. From those people I've saved up something. Remember that I didn't need anything, absolutely nothing, and they gave me a considerable allowance for my trifling pleasures.

Then he began hitting his forehead again with one of his fists, biting his lip, rolling his wild eyes up to the ceiling, commenting, "But that business is

over and done with. I've set something aside. Time has gone by. It's always that much more of a gain."

ME: You mean more of a loss.

HIM: No, no. More of a gain. We become richer every moment. It's one less day to go on living, or one écu more — it's all one. The important point is to keep emptying one's bowels easily, freely, pleasurably, copiously every night. *O stercus pretiosum!* That's the grand result of life in all conditions. In the last analysis, everyone is equally rich — Samuel Bernard, who by dint of robbery, pillaging, and bankruptcies leaves twenty-seven million in gold, or Rameau, who won't leave anything, Rameau, for whom charity will provide a floor cloth as a shroud to wrap him in. A dead man doesn't hear the bells tolling. It's a waste of time for one hundred priests to shout themselves hoarse on his behalf or for him to be preceded and followed by a long line of burning torches. His soul does not walk alongside the master of ceremonies. To rot under marble or to rot under the earth — it's still rotting. To have around your coffin choirboys in red and choirboys in blue or none at all — what does that matter? Take a good look at this wrist. It used to be stiff as the devil. These ten fingers were like so many sticks stuck into a wooden metacarpal. And these tendons were old cords of catgut — drier, stiffer, and more inflexible that those used to turn a lathe operator's wheel. But I've tormented, broken, and abused them so much. You don't want to move, but, by God, I say that you will and that's that!

As he said this, with his right hand he grabbed the fingers and wrist of his left hand and bent them back and forth. The tips of his fingers were touching his arm. His joints were cracking. I was afraid he'd end up dislocating the bones.

ME: Be careful, I say to him. You're going to hurt yourself.

HIM: Don’t worry. They can stand it. For ten years I’ve given them a hard time. Whatever they felt like, the little buggers had to get used to it and learn to strike the keys and fly over the strings. So right now they’re working. Yes, they’re working fine.

At that moment he takes on the pose of a violin player. He hums an allegro from Locatelli, and his right arm imitates the movement of the bow, while his left hand and his fingers seem to move along the length of the neck. If he hits a wrong note, he stops, tightens or loosens the string and plucks the string with his nail, to make sure that it’s just right. He resumes playing the piece where he has stopped. He keeps time with his feet, and thrashes about with his head, feet, hands, arms, and body.

Perhaps at some concert of spiritual music you’ve had occasion to see Ferrari or Chiabran or some other virtuoso in the same sort of convulsions, presenting a picture of the same torture. That gives me almost as much pain, for surely it’s agonizing to watch the torment of someone who is busy giving me a representation of pleasure. If he simply has to show me a patient under torture, then draw a curtain between the man and me, something to conceal me. In the midst of his agitation and cries, if there was a moment when the note had to be held, one of those harmonious spots when the bow is drawn slowly across several strings at once, his face took on an ecstatic expression, his voice softened, and he listened in rapture. He was sure the harmony was resonating in his ears and mine. Then, placing his instrument under his left arm using the same hand he was holding it with and letting his right hand holding the bow fall, he said, “Well, what do you think of that?”

ME: Wonderful.

HIM: That was all right, I thought. That sounded almost like the others.

All at once he crouches down like a musician sitting down at a keyboard. I say to him, “Have mercy on yourself and me.”

HIM: No, no. Since I’ve got your attention, you’ll listen. I don’t want anyone’s approval unless they know why. You’ll praise me with a more confident tone, and that might be worth another pupil to me.

ME: I don’t go out very much, and you’re going to exhaust yourself to no purpose.

HIM: I’m never tired.

Since I saw that my wish to pity the man was useless, for the violin sonata had left him bathed in sweat, I decided to let him do what he wanted. So there he was, seated at the keyboard, his legs bent, his head raised towards the ceiling where one would have said he was looking at a written musical score, singing, playing a prelude, working through a piece by Alberti or Galuppi, I don’t know which of the two. His voice went like the wind, and his fingers flew across the keys, sometimes abandoning the upper part to play the bass, sometimes abandoning the accompaniment to return to the upper register. A series of emotions went in succession across his face. You could see there tenderness, anger, pleasure, sadness. You could feel the soft notes and the loud ones.

I’m sure that someone more astute than myself would have recognized the piece from the movement and style, from his expressions, and from some snatches of melody coming out of him now and then. But what was really strange was that from time to time he groped around and started again, as if he had made a mistake and was upset at himself for not having the piece at his finger tips. Finally he straightened up, wiped the beads of sweat running down his cheeks, and said, “You see that we also know how to play a tritone

or an augmented fifth, and that we're familiar with transitions of dominants. Those enharmonic passages which my dear uncle has made such a fuss about, there's not all that much to it. We'll get a handle on it."

ME: You've gone to a lot of trouble to show me that you've got great skill. But I'm a man who would've taken your word for it.

HIM: Great skill? Oh no! I know a few tricks of the trade, and that's more than one needs. After all, in this country does anyone have to understand what he teaches?

ME: No more than people have to understand what they learn.

HIM: That's well said, my God, very apt. There, Mister Philosopher, cross your heart and tell the truth. There was a time when you weren't as well off as you are today.

HE: I'm not all that well off even now.

HIM: But you'll no longer be going to the Luxembourg in summer. You remember...

ME: Drop that subject. Yes, I do remember.

HIM: In a gray plush frock coat.

ME: Yes, yes.

HIM: All worn out on one side, with frayed cuffs and black wool stockings stitched up the back with white thread.

ME: Yes, indeed. Everything just as you like.

HIM: What did you do then in the Alley of Sighs?

ME: I was a sorry enough sight.

HIM: When you left there, you used to scurry along the pavement.

ME: That's right.

HIM: You gave lessons in mathematics.

ME: Without understanding a word of it. Isn't that where you want to go?

HIM: Exactly.

ME: I learned by teaching others, and I produced some good students.

HIM: That may well be, but with music things aren't the same as in algebra or geometry. Now, these days you are a grand gentleman...

ME: Not so grand.

HIM: But you're well-to-do.

ME: Not really.

HIM: You provide tutors for your daughter.

ME: Not any more. It's her mother who's concerned about her education, and one has to have peace at home.

HIM: Peace at home? My God, one only has that when one is the servant or the master. And it's essential to be the master. I had a wife. God rest her soul, but when she got the idea now and then to answer back, my hackles rose. I let go with my thunder and said, like God, "Let there be light." And

there was light. So over a four-year period, we didn't raise our voices in a row ten times. How old is your child?

ME: That's got nothing to do with it.

HIM: How old is your child?

ME: What the devil — leave my child and her age out of it, and let's get back to the teachers she'll have.

HIM: My goodness, I know nothing as stubborn as a philosopher. If one supplicates you very humbly, might one not be able to learn from Monsieur the Philosopher the approximate age of Mademoiselle his daughter?

ME: Let's assume she's eight years old.

HIM: Eight! She should have had her fingers on the keys four years ago.

ME: But perhaps I don't worry very much about putting into the plan for her education a study which is so time-consuming and which is so little use.

HIM: And what are you intending to teach her? Please tell me.

ME: To reason correctly, if I can. That's something uncommon among men and even rarer still among women.

HIM: Let her reason badly, as much as she likes, provided she's pretty, amusing, and flirtatious.

ME: Since in her case nature has been so ungrateful as to give her a delicate constitution with a sensible soul and to expose her to the same pains of life as if she had a strong constitution and a heart made of bronze, I'll teach her, if I can, to bear those pains bravely.

HIM: Oh, leave her to cry, suffer, and simper, with delicate nerves, like the others, provided she is pretty, amusing, and flirtatious. What, no dancing?

ME: No more than what's necessary for her to curtsey and have a decent carriage, to present herself well, and to know how to move.

HIM: No singing?

ME: No more than is necessary for her to enunciate well.

HIM: No music?

ME: If there was a good teacher of harmony, I would willingly entrust her to him for two hours a day for one or two years, no more.

HIM: And in the place of these essential things you are cutting out...

ME: I put grammar, literature, history, geography, a little drawing, and a great deal of moral instruction.

HIM: It would be so easy for me to prove to you the uselessness of all those subjects in a world like ours. Did I say uselessness — perhaps I should have said danger. But for the moment I'll confine myself to one question: Won't one or two teachers be necessary?

ME: Undoubtedly.

HIM: Ah, well there we are again! And these teachers — you hope they'll know something about the grammar, literature, history, geography, and morality which they're teaching her in her lessons? That's just a song and dance, my dear sir, a song and dance. If they grasped these matters well enough to teach them, they wouldn't be teaching them.

ME: Why not?

HIM: Because they would have spent their lives studying them. It's necessary to be profound in art or in science in order to grasp the basics well. Educational works can only be properly produced by those who have grown white in harness. It's the middle and the end which illuminate the shadows at the beginning. Ask your friend Mr. d'Alembert, the leading light in the mathematical sciences, if he would be too good to teach the basics. Only after twenty or thirty years of practice did my uncle glimpse the first faint light of musical theory.

ME: Oh you idiot, you total idiot! How is it that in your wretched head there are such reasonable ideas all mixed up higgledy piggledy with so many absurdities?

HIM: Who the devil knows? Chance throws them out to you, and they stay with you. Still, when we doesn't know everything, we don't know anything well. We don't know where something is going or where something else comes from, where this or that should fit, which should go first or whether it would be better to go second. Can anyone teach well without a method? And where is that method born? You see, my philosopher, I have this notion that physics will always be a poor science, a drop of water picked up by a needle from the vast ocean, a grain detached from the mountain range of the Alps. And the reasons for phenomena? In truth, it would be just as good to be ignorant about them as to understand them so little and so badly. That was exactly where I was when I made myself a teacher of accompaniment and composition. What are you dreaming about?

ME: I'm dreaming that everything you've just said is more specious than substantial. But let's leave that. Did you say you taught accompaniment and composition?

HIM: Yes.

ME: And you didn't understand them at all?

HIM: No, my goodness, not at all. And that's the reason there were worse teachers than me — those who believed they understood something. At least I didn't ruin the judgment or the hands of the children. When they left me for a good teacher, they'd learned nothing, and so at least they didn't have to unlearn anything. And that was always so much money and time saved.

ME: How did you manage that?

HIM: How they all do. I arrived. I threw myself into a chair. "What dreadful weather! How tiring the pavement is!" I chattered about some news: "Miss Lemierre was to have taken on the role of a vestal virgin in the new opera. But she is pregnant for the second time. They don't know who will take her place. Miss Arnould has just left her count. People say she is negotiating with Bertin. The little count, however, has just found out about Mr. de Montamy's porcelain. At the last concert for the lovers of music there was an Italian woman who sang like an angel. That Preville is an exceptional fellow. You must see him in the *Mercure galant*. The part about the riddle is priceless. And poor Dumesnil no longer knows what she's saying or doing. Come, Mademoiselle, take your book." While the young lady, who's in no hurry, looks for her book, which she has mislaid, and while the maid is being summoned and chastised, I keep going, "That Clairon is truly incomprehensible. People are talking about a really crazy marriage — one with Miss What's-Her-Name, a little creature he's been supporting, with whom he's had two or three children and who's been kept by so many others." "Come now, Rameau, that's not possible. You're rambling on." "No, I'm not rambling. They even say that the marriage has taken place.

There’s a rumour going around that Voltaire is dead. So much the better.” “Why’s that good?” “Well, that means he’s going to give us some fine foolishness. He has a habit of dying two weeks before he does so.” What else shall I tell you? I told her a few naughty remarks which I’d brought back from some homes where I’d been, for we are all great gossips. I played the fool, and they listened to me. They laughed. They cried out, “He’s always charming.” However, the young lady’s book was finally recovered from under an armchair, where it had been dragged, chewed, and ripped by a young pug dog or by a kitten. She sat at the keyboard. At first she made some noise there, all by herself. Then I came up, after having given her mother a sign of approval. The mother said, “That isn’t bad. One need only to want to do it, but one doesn’t want to. One prefers to waste one’s time with chit-chat, clothes, running around, and I don’t know what. As soon as you’re gone, the book is closed and it’s not opened again until you return. And then you never reprimand her...” However, since I had to do something, I took her hands and placed them in a different position. I got upset. I cried out, “G, G, G, mademoiselle. It’s a G.” The mother, “Young lady, don’t you have an ear? I’m not even at the keyboard, and I’m not looking at your book, but I feel that that must be a G. You’re giving this gentleman a great deal of trouble. I don’t understand his patience. You don’t retain anything he tells you. You’re not progressing at all...” Then I eased the blows a little, by shaking my head and saying, “Excuse me, madam, excuse me. Yes, that could go better, if the young lady wanted to, if she studied a little. But it’s not going badly.” The mother: “In your place, I’d keep her on the same piece for a year.” “That’s all right — she won’t leave it until she has surmounted all the difficulties, and that won’t take as long as madam thinks.” The mother: “Mr. Rameau, you’re flattering her. You’re too kind. That’s the only thing she’ll remember from her lesson, and she’ll know the right time to repeat it in front of me.” The hour went by. My pupil

gave me the small fee, with a graceful movement of her arm and the curtsy she had learned from her dancing master. I put it in my pocket, while the mother said, “Very good, mademoiselle. If Javillier were here, he’d applaud you.” I kept chatting for a moment longer out of courtesy, then disappeared. There you have it — that’s what people used to call a lesson in accompaniment in those days.

ME: And nowadays, it’s something different.

HIM: My God, I should think so. I arrive. I’m serious. I’m in a rush to take off my coat. I open the keyboard. I test the keys. I’m always in a hurry. If anyone makes me wait for a moment, I cry out as if they’ve stolen an écu from me. In an hour from now I have to be over there, in two hours at madam’s house, the duchess of something or other. I’m expected to dine at the home of a beautiful marquise, and once I leave there, to go to a concert in the house of Baron de Bacq, in Rue Neuve des Petits Champs.

ME: Of course, you’re not expected anywhere?

HIM: That’s the truth.

ME: So why do you use all these vile little schemes?

HIM: Vile? Why vile, if you please? They’re what’s customary in my profession. I don’t demean myself in acting just like everyone else. I’m not the one who invented them. And I’d be really odd and tactless if I didn’t conform. Of course, I know very well that if you’re going to apply certain universal principles from I don’t know what morality which all of them mouth but none of them practices, it will end up that what’s white will really be black and what’s black will really be white. But, Mister Philosopher, there’s a universal conscience, just as there’s a universal

grammar, and then there are exception in every language. You call them, I think, you scholarly types, some...give me some help here...some...

ME: Idioms.

HIM: That's it. Well, every profession has its exceptions to the general conscience. I'm happy to call these trade idioms.

ME: I understand. Fontenelle speaks well and writes well, although his style is crawling with French idioms.

HIM: And the sovereign, the minister, the financier, the magistrate, the soldier, the man of letters, the lawyer, the prosecutor, the merchant, the banker, the artisan, the singing master, the dancing master — these are all really honest people, although their conduct goes against the general conscience in several points and is full of moral idioms. The older the business institution, the more idioms there are. The worse times get, the more idioms multiply. Whatever the man is worth, that's what the job is worth, and conversely, in the end, whatever the job is worth, that's what the man is worth. So we value the job as much as we can.

ME: What I can see clearly from all this nonsense is that there are few professions honestly practised or few honest people in their professions.

HIM: Right, there aren't any. But, on the other hand, few of them are rascals outside their own shops, and everything would go well enough if there weren't a certain number of people whom we call diligent and accurate, who carry out their duties rigorously and strictly, or, what amounts to the same thing, who are always in their shops busy with their trade from morning to evening, doing nothing else. In addition, they're the only ones who get rich and respected.

ME: Because of idioms.

HIM: That's it. I see you've understood what I've been saying. All right, one idiom in almost every profession — for there are idioms common to all countries and all times, just as there are common ways of being foolish — a common idiom is to acquire for oneself the largest number of customers as possible. A common stupidity is to believe that the person who has the most customers is the most expert. There you have two exceptions to the general conscience which we have to bow down to. It's a sort of credit system. In itself it's nothing, but it is worth something in public opinion. It's been said that a good reputation is more valuable than a golden belt. However, the man with a good reputation doesn't have a golden belt, but I see that nowadays the man with the golden belt rarely lacks a good reputation. It's necessary, as much as possible to have the good reputation and the belt. And that's my goal, when I make myself valuable by what you characterize as vile tricks and unworthy little schemes. I give my lesson, and I give it well — there's the general rule. I let people believe that I've more lessons to give than there are hours in the day — that's the idiom.

ME: And the lesson — you give a good one?

HIM: Yes, not bad, quite good. My dear uncle's fundamental bass has made it all a lot simpler. Before that I used to rob my pupil of money, yes, I did, that's for sure. But today I earn it, at least as much as the others.

ME: And did you steal the money without any guilt?

HIM: Oh, none whatsoever. People say that if one robber steals from another, the devil laughs. The parents are overflowing with a fortune they've acquired — God knows how — they're from the court or financiers or great merchants or bankers or business people. I was helping them pay

some of it back, me and a crowd of others just like me whom they employed. In nature all species devour each other, and in society all the classes feed on one another. We bring justice to each other without the law getting involved. Earlier that woman Deschamps and nowadays Guimard are the prince's vengeance on the financier, and then the fashion merchant, the jeweler, the upholsterer, the laundry woman, the swindler, the chambermaid, the cook, the saddle maker get their revenge on Deschamps on behalf of the financier. In the middle of all this, it's only the idiot or the lay-about who gets hurt, without having upset anyone — and that's just fine. So from all this you see that these exceptions to the general conscience or these moral idioms about which people make such a fuss, calling them tricks of the trade, are nothing and that, in the last analysis, the only thing one needs is to keep one's eyes open.

ME: Your eyes are admirable.

HIM: And then there's poverty. The voice of conscience and honour are really feeble when one's guts are crying out. If I ever get rich, I'll certainly have to give the money back, and I'm firmly resolved to do so in all possible ways — dining, gambling, wine, women.

ME: But I'm afraid you'll never get rich.

HIM: I suspect the same thing myself.

ME: But if things turn out differently, what will you do?

HIM: I'd act like all beggars whose life has turned around. I'd be the most insolent rogue anyone has ever seen. Then I'd remember everything they made me suffer, and I'd pay them back full measure for the humiliations they put me through. I like to give orders, and that's what I'd do. I like it

when people praise me, and praise me they will. I'll have in my service all Villemorien's hangers-on, and I'll speak to them they way they spoke to me, "Come on, you scoundrels, amuse me," and they'll amuse me, "Rip some honest people to shreds," and they'll tear them apart, if there are any still to be found. And then we'll have girls, and all address each other as friends when we're drunk, and we'll get drunk. We'll make up stories. We'll have all sorts of quirks and vices. It will be delicious. We'll prove that Voltaire has no genius, that Buffon is always strutting formally on stilts and is nothing but a bombastic windbag, that Montesquieu is nothing more than a witty fellow. We'll consign d'Alembert to his mathematics, and we'll throw down onto their bellies and backs all those little Catos, like you, who despise us from envy, whose modesty is a coat covering their pride, and whose sobriety is a law arising from their own needs. And music? That's when we'll make music.

ME: Given the dignified way you'd use your wealth I see what a great pity it is that you're a pauper. You'd live in a way that would confer great honour on the human species and would be really useful to your fellow citizens and truly glorious for yourself.

HIM: I think you're making fun of me, Mister Philosopher. You don't know who you're playing with. You don't suspect that at this moment I represent the most important party in the town and at court. The wealthy people in all professions either have told themselves the same things I've confided to you or they have not, but the fact is that the life I'd live in their place is exactly the life they lead. That's just where you are, too, you others. You believe that happiness is the same thing for everyone. What a strange vision! Your version assumes a certain romantic frame of mind which we don't have, a peculiar soul, a strange taste. You dress this weirdness up with the name virtue. You call it philosophy. But are virtue and philosophy made

for everyone? Some are able to get them, and some can keep them. Imagine a wise and philosophical universe. You'll concede it would be devilishly sad. So long live philosophy, long live the wisdom of Solomon. Drink good wine, gorge oneself on choice delicacies, roll around on beautiful women, lie on lovely soft beds. Other than that, the rest is nothing but vanity.

ME: What about defending one's country?

HIM: That's vanity. There's no country any more. From one pole to the other all I see is tyrants and slaves.

ME: Helping one's friends?

HIM: Vanity. Does one really have friends? And if we had, would we have to make them ungrateful? Look closely, and you'll notice that that's almost always what you get back for services rendered. Gratitude is a burden, and every burden is put there to be shaken off.

ME: Occupy a position in society and carry out its duties?

HIM: Vanity. What does it matter whether one has a position or not, provided that one is rich, since no one assumes a position except to get rich? Carry out its duties — where does that lead? To jealousy, trouble, persecution. Is that the way one gets ahead? Pay court to people, by God, pay court to them. Observe great people, study their tastes, take part in their fantasies, serve their vices, applaud their injustices. That's the secret.

ME: Taking care of the education of one's children?

HIM: Vanity. That's the business of a tutor.

ME: But if this tutor has fully absorbed your principles and neglects his duties, who's going to be punished for it?

HIM: My goodness, it won't be me. Maybe someday my daughter's husband or my son's wife.

ME: But what if both your son and daughter hurl themselves into debauchery and vice?

HIM: That's their look out.

ME: What if they dishonour themselves?

HIM: Whatever one does, one cannot dishonour oneself if one is rich.

ME: What if they ruin themselves.

HIM: Too bad for them.

ME: I see that if you can dispense with taking care of the conduct of your wife, your children, and your servants, you could easily neglect your own affairs.

HIM: Excuse me, but no. It's sometimes difficult to find money, and it's prudent to get it well in advance.

ME: You'll pay little attention to your wife?

HIM: None whatsoever, if you please. The best arrangement which one can have with one's dear better half, I think, is to do whatever one wants. In your view, wouldn't society be really amusing if everyone did what was agreeable to them?

ME: Why not? The evening is never more beautiful for me than when I'm happy about my morning.

HIM: The same goes for me.

ME: What makes fashionable people so delicate about their amusements is that they are profoundly idle.

HIM: Don't you believe it. They run around a lot.

ME: Since they never get tired, they never relax.

HIM: Don't believe that. They are constantly exhausted from excess.

ME: Pleasure is always a business for them, never a need.

HIM: So much the better. Need is always painful.

ME: They wear everything out. Their souls become stupefied. Boredom grabs hold of them. Whoever took away their lives in the midst of their overwhelming abundance would be doing them a service. The fact is they don't know anything about happiness except the part which becomes jaded most quickly. I don't disparage the pleasures of the senses. I have a palate as well, and it really likes a tasty delicacy or a delicious wine. I have a heart and eyes, and I like to see a beautiful woman. I like to have my hands feel the firmness and the roundness of her breasts, to press her lips against mine, to soak up rapture from her looks, and to die in her arms. I'm not against a party with my friends sometimes, a debauch, even one that gets a little out of hand. But I won't conceal from you that it is infinitely more pleasurable to me to have helped someone in distress, brought some difficult business to a conclusion, given some beneficial advice, read something agreeable, taken a walk with a man or woman close to my heart, passed some instructive

hours with my children, written a good page, fulfilled the duties of my position, or told the woman I love something tender and soft, so that she put her arms around my neck. I know the sorts of actions I would give up all I own to have done. *Mahomet* is a sublime work of literature, but I would prefer to have rehabilitated the memory of Calas. An acquaintance of mine once took refuge in Cartagena. He was the youngster of the family in a country where custom gives all property to the eldest. There he learned that his older brother, a spoiled child, after stripping his mother and father very easily of everything they possessed, had kicked them out of their chateau and that the good old people were languishing in poverty in a small town in the provinces. So what then did this youngster do, a boy who had been treated harshly by his parents and had gone to see if he could win his fortune far away? He sent them assistance. He quickly wound up his own affairs and returned wealthy. He brought his father and mother back into their home. He arranged for his sisters to be married. Ah, my dear Rameau, the man considered this period the happiest of his life. When he told me of it, he had tears in his eyes. And as I tell you the story, I feel my heart beating for joy, and my delight makes talking difficult.

HIM: You people are so very odd!

ME: And you are creatures who well deserve to be pitied if you can’t see how we’ve raised ourselves above our fate and that it’s impossible to be unhappy under the shelter of two fine actions like the ones I’ve just mentioned.

HIM: Well, that’s a type of happiness which I’ll find it difficult to get familiar with, because we meet it rarely. But, according to you, should we then be decent people?

ME: To be happy? Yes, certainly.

HIM: But I see countless decent people who are not happy, and countless people who are happy without being decent.

ME: So it seems to you.

HIM: But isn't it because I had some common sense and candour for a moment that I have no idea where to get a meal this evening?

ME: Not at all. The reason is you've not had those qualities all along. It's because you didn't realize early on that it's first necessary to create options for yourself which will make you independent, free from serving others.

HIM: Independent or not, what I've made for myself is at least the most comfortable.

ME: And the least secure and the least honest.

HIM: But it's the one best suited to my character as a lazy man, fool, and scoundrel.

ME: I agree with that.

HIM: And since I can find happiness through vices natural to me, which I've acquired without working, which I maintain without effort, which are compatible with the customs of my country, which suit the taste of those who protect me and are closer to their small particular needs than virtues which would embarrass them, by criticizing them morning and night, it would be really odd if I were to go on tormenting myself like some soul in hell in order to cut myself up and make myself something other than I am, to give myself a character foreign to my own, very worthy qualities — I'll concede that, to avoid an argument — but which would cost me a great deal to acquire and to practise, and which would lead to nothing, perhaps worse

than nothing, because all the time I'd have to satirize the rich people among whom beggars like me have to find a living. People praise virtue, but they hate it. They run away from it, because it makes them freezing cold, and in this world one has to have warm feet. Besides, it would inevitably make me moody. Why else do we so often see devout people so hard, so angry, so unsociable? It's because they've imposed on themselves a task which isn't natural to them. They suffer, and when one suffers, one makes others suffer. That's not what I want, nor my patrons. I have to be happy, flexible, pleasant, funny, amusing. Virtue makes itself respected, and respect is uncomfortable. Virtue makes itself admired, and admiration is not amusing. My business is with people who are bored, and I have to make them laugh. So I have to be ridiculous and funny. And if nature had not made me that way, the simplest thing would be to appear like that. Fortunately, I don't need to be a hypocrite. There are already so many of them of every stripe, without counting those who are hypocritical even with themselves. Take that Chevalier de la Morlière, who turns up his hat above his ears, who holds his head in the air, who looks at you over his shoulder as you go by, who has a long sword banging against his thigh, who has an insult ready for anyone who doesn't carry one, and who seems to be issuing a challenge to everyone coming along. What's he doing? Everything he can to persuade himself that he's a stout-hearted man. But he's a coward. Just tweak the end of his nose — he's take it quietly. If you want to make him lower his voice, raise you own. Show him your cane or give him a kick in the ass. He'll be astonished to find out he's a coward and will ask you how you found out, who told you. The moment before he was ignorant of the fact, for his long and habitual aping of bravery had impressed on him that he was. He'd gone through the pretence so many times he believed that's what he was. And that woman who mortifies herself, who visits prisons, who helps at all the charitable meetings, who walks along with her eyes lowered, who would

never dare to look a man in the face, always on guard against being seduced by her senses, does all that keep her heart from burning, sighs escaping from her, her temperament catching fire, her desires obsessing her, and her imagination going over and over night and day scenes from the *Portier des Chartreux* or the *Postures de l'Arétin*. So then what happens to her? What does her maid think of her when she gets up in her nightdress and rushes to help her mistress as she's dying? Justine, go back to bed. It's not you your mistress is calling for in her delirium. And what about friend Rameau, what if one day he began to show signs of contempt for wealth, women, good food, and laziness and started to act like Cato, what would he be? A hypocrite. Rameau has to be what he is — a happy thief among wealthy thieves, and not a virtuous swaggerer or even a virtuous man, gnawing his crust of bread by himself or among beggars. To sum up — I won't put up with your idea of happiness or the well being of a few visionaries like you.

ME: I see, my dear fellow, that you have no idea what that is and that you're not even capable of learning what it is.

HIM: So much the better, by God, so much the better. It would probably make me die of hunger, boredom, and remorse.

ME: Given that, the only advice I have for you is to go back quickly to the house where you so imprudently got yourself thrown out.

HIM: And do what you don't object to literally but find offensive metaphorically?

ME: That's my advice.

HIM: Regardless of that metaphor which I object to for the moment but which won't bother me at some other time.

ME: How odd you are!

HIM: There's nothing odd about it. I'm happy enough to be abject, but I want that to happen without any compulsion. It's all right with me to abandon my dignity...What's so funny?

ME: Your dignity makes me laugh.

HIM: Everyone has his own. I'm happy to forget mine, but at my own discretion, and not on someone else's orders. Does it have to be the case that when someone can say to me "Crawl" I have to crawl? That's how a worm operates — and it's my way, too. We both follow it, when people leave us alone. But we raise ourselves up when someone steps on our tails. People have stepped on my tail, and I straightened up. But then you have no idea of the madhouse we're talking about. Imagine a melancholy and sullen personality, consumed with vapours, wrapped up in two or three layers of dressing gown, who loves himself but who's unhappy about everything, a person from whom it's difficult to get a smile, even if you distort your body and mind in a hundred different ways. He examines coldly the pleasant grimaces of my face and of my judgment, which are even more pleasant, for, between us, that father Christmas, that nasty Benedictine so famous for his grimaces, for all his success at court, is nothing but a wooden Punch in comparison to me — and I say that without praising myself or him. I went to great lengths tormenting myself to reach the highest arts of the idiot house. But it's no use. Will he laugh? Won't he? That's what I'm forced to say to myself in the middle of my contortions, and you can judge how much this uncertainty damages one's talent. My hypochondriac, with a nightcap pulled down over his head covering his eyes, has the expression of an immobile idol with a string attached around his chin, which goes from there right down under his armchair. One waits for the string to be pulled, but it's

not pulled. If it so happens that the jaws open, it's to utter a distressing word, a word which informs you that you've not even been noticed and that all your monkey tricks have been wasted. This word is a response to a question you asked him four days ago. Once the word has been uttered, the mastoid spring is released, and the jaws snap shut.

Then he began to imitate the man he was talking about. He was seated in a chair with his head fixed, his cap right down to his eyelids, his eyes half shut, his arms hanging down, moving his jaws like a robot. He said: "'Yes, you are right, mademoiselle. One has to be perceptive in these matters.' That's the person who decides, who always decides, and there's no appeal — in the evening, in the morning, at his morning toilet, at dinner, in the café, at the gaming table, in the theatre, at supper, in bed and, God forgive me, in the arms of his mistress, too, I think. I'm not in a position to hear these last decisions, but I'm damn weary of the others. Sad, obscure, cut and dried, like fate — that's the kind of patron we have."

"Right across from him there's a prudish woman who's pretending to be important. One could persuade oneself that she's attractive, because she still is, although her face has some scabs here and there and she's getting as large as Madame Bouvillion. I do like flesh when it's beautiful, but for all that, too much is too much. Movement is so essential to matter! *Item* — she is more malicious, more proud, more stupid than a goose. *Item* — she'd like to have wit. *Item* — one has to persuade her that people think she's more witty than anyone else. *Item* — she knows nothing, but she makes decisions, too. *Item* — one has to applaud these decisions with one's feet and hands, to jump for joy, to become paralyzed with admiration: 'Your decision is so beautiful, delicate, well said, perceptive, uniquely felt. Where do you women get all this? Without any studying, purely by the power of instinct, by your own natural light — it's miraculous. And then people come

to tell us that experience, study, reflection, and education all play a part in it.' All sorts of other similar stupidities, with tears of joy. To bow down ten times a day, with one knee bent in front and the other leg stuck out behind, one's arms stretched towards the goddess, looking for her desires in her eyes, hanging onto her lip, waiting for her order, and dashing off like a bolt of lightning. Who could subject himself to such a role, except the poor wretch who, two or three times a week, finds something there to calm the tribulation of his intestines? What is one to think of the others, like Palissot, Fréron, the Poinsinets, Baculard, who do have some property, and whose baseness thus cannot be excused by the rumbling of a suffering stomach?"

ME: I'd never have though you were so fussy.

HIM: I'm not. At first I used to watch the others doing it, and I carried on like them, even a little better, because I'm more candidly impudent, a better actor — and I was hungrier and equipped with better lungs. Apparently I trace my descent in a direct line from the famous Stentor.

And to give me a fair idea of the force of this organ of his, he began to cough violently enough to make the windows in the café rattle and to divert the attention of the chess players from their game.

ME: But what good is this talent?

HIM: You can't guess?

ME: No. I'm a bit limited.

HIM: Supposing a dispute has started and victory is uncertain. I stand up and, displaying my thunder, cry out, "It's just as Madame has assured us it is. That's what one calls judgment, a hundred times better than our fine

wits. The expression is pure genius." But one mustn't always approve in the same way. That would make one monotonous. You'd look false and would become insipid. The only way around that is with judgment and creativity. You need to know how to prepare and when to put in those peremptory major tones, how to seize your chance and the moment, for example, when there is a division of opinion, when the argument has moved up to the final stage of violence, when no one is in agreement any more, when everyone is speaking at once — then you must take up a position some distance away, in the corner to the apartment furthest removed from the field of battle. You must prepare for the eruption with a long silence and then blow up suddenly, like an explosion, in the middle of the contenders. No one has my skill in this art. But where I'm really surprising is in the opposite skill — I have some soft notes which I accompany with a smile, an infinite variety of expressions of approval, bringing into play my nose, mouth, forehead, and eyes. I have a supple back, a way of turning my spine, or raising and lowering my shoulders, extending my fingers, inclining my head, closing my eyes, and being amazed, as if I'd heard the voice of a divine angel coming down from heaven. That's what does the flattering. I'm not sure if you really understand the full power of the attitude I've just mentioned. I didn't invent it, but no one has pulled it off better than me. Look. Watch this.

ME: It's certainly unique.

HIM: Do you think that there's a slightly vain female brain which could hold out against it?

ME: No. I have to concede that you have taken the talent for making fools of people and for demeaning oneself as far as it's possible to go.

HIM: All those other, however many there are — they'll do well, but they'll never get to that point. The best of them, Palissot, for example, will never be anything but a good pupil. But if this role is amusing at first and if you enjoy the pleasure of laughing to yourself at the stupidity of those you are intoxicating, in the long run it loses its appeal. Besides, after a certain number of discoveries, you have to repeat yourself. Wit and art have their limits. Only God or a few rare geniuses could make a career out of it which grows as they advance. Bouret is such a person, perhaps. That man has certain tricks which impress me (yes, even me) as sublime ideas — the little dog, the book of happiness, the torches on the road to Versailles — those are things which stagger me and put me to shame. It could be enough to make one unhappy with the profession.

ME: What about that little dog? What are you talking about?

HIM: Where have you come from? What — in all seriousness, you don't know how that extraordinary man set about detaching himself from a little dog and attaching it to the Keeper of the Seals, who'd taken a fancy to it?

ME: I confess I have no idea..

HIM: So much the better. It's one of the most beautiful things one could imagine. All Europe marveled at it, and there isn't a single courtier who wasn't envious of it. You're a man who doesn't lack a certain shrewdness — let's see what you'd have done in his place. Remember that Bouret was loved by his dog. Remember that the odd costume of the minister used to terrify the little animal. And remember that there were only eight days to overcome the difficulties. One has to understand all the conditions attached to the problem in order to appreciate properly the merit of the solution. Well then?

ME: Well, I have to confess to you that in this sort of thing the simplest things baffle me.

HIM: Listen (he says to me, giving me a slight blow on the shoulder — he's very informal), listen and admire. He has someone make him a mask which looks like the Keeper of the Seals, and he borrows the latter's voluminous robe from a footman. He covers his face with the mask and puts on the robe. He calls his dog and caresses it. He give it a biscuit. Then all of a sudden, with a change of clothes, he is no longer the Keeper of the Seals, but Bouret. He calls his dog and beats it. In less than two or three days of doing this exercise from morning to night, the dog learns to run away from Bouret the Farmer General and run to Bouret the Keeper of the Seals. But I'm being too kind. You're a layman who doesn't deserve to be instructed in the miracles which go on right beside you.

ME: In spite of that, if you don't mind, the book and the torches?

HIM: No, no. Ask the cobble stones. They'll tell you about those things. You must profit from the circumstances which have brought us together to learn those things which no one knows except me.

ME: You're right.

HIM: To borrow the robe and the wig of the Keeper of the Seals — I'd forgotten about the wig! To make a mask which looks like him! It's the mask above all that turns my head. Also this man is of the highest respectability, and he owns millions. There are men with the Saint Louis cross who don't have any bread, so why run after the cross at the risk of working oneself to death and not turn to an activity with no danger which never fails to pay? That's what we call acting in the grand manner. Role models like that are disheartening. One pities oneself and loses interest.

That mask! The mask! I'd give one of my fingers to have come up with that mask.

ME: But with this enthusiasm of yours for fine things and the creative genius you possess, have you invented anything?

HIM: Let's see — well, one example is the attitude of admiration I make with my back which I spoke you about. I look upon that as mine, although some envious people could perhaps argue with me about it. I think that people used it before, but who realized just how handy it was for having a secret laugh at the fool one was admiring? I have more than a hundred ways to start the seduction of a young girl right under her mother's nose, without her perceiving a thing, and even making her an accomplice. I'd hardly started on my career when I turned my back on all the common ways to slip someone a love letter. I have ten ways of getting people to snatch it away from me. Among these methods, I dare flatter myself that there are some original ones. Above all, I possess the talent for encouraging a timid young man. I've enabled some to succeed who had neither wit nor looks. If that were all written out, I think that people would attribute some genius to me.

ME: Would you get remarkable honours?

HIM: I don't doubt it.

ME: If I were you, I'd put those things down on paper. It would be a pity if they were lost.

HIM: That's true, but you have no idea how unimportant method and precepts are to me. Someone who needs written instructions will never get far. Geniuses read little, act a great deal, and create themselves. Look at Caesar, Turenne, Vauban, the Marquise de Tencin, his brother the cardinal,

and the cardinal's secretary, Abbé Trublet. And Bouret? Who gave Bouret lessons? No one. It's nature that makes exceptional men like that. Do you think that the story of the dog and the mask is written down somewhere?

ME: But in the hours when you have nothing to do — when the agony of your empty stomach or the weariness in your crammed stomach stop you from sleeping...

HIM: I'll think about it. It's better to write about great things than to carry out trivial ones. Then the soul is raised, the imagination heats up, catches fire, and grows, instead of shrinking up beside the little Hus girl, in her amazement at the applause which the idiotic public insists on lavishing on that simpering Dangeville, who acts with so little imagination, who moves through the scene almost doubled over and affects to stare continuously into the eyes of whoever she is talking to, underplays her role, and who confuses her own grimaces with subtlety, her tiny trotting around with graceful movement — or on that bombastic Clairon woman who's scrawnier, more affected, more mannered and starchy than anyone could imagine. Those idiots in the pit bring the house down applauding them. They don't see that we are a pack full of charm. It's true that the pack is getting somewhat larger, but so what? We have the most beautiful skin, the finest eyes, the best-looking mouths — not much heart inside, to be sure — a walk which is not light, but not as awkward as people maintain. As for feelings, on the other hand, there isn't one which we couldn't overtrump.

ME: Why are you saying all this? Are you being truthful or ironical?

HIM: The problem is that this devil of a feeling is all inside and no glimmer of it reaches the outside. But as for me — the one talking to you — I know, and know well, that she has some. Well, if it's not that exactly, it's something like it. You need to see how we treat servants, when we're in the

mood, how we slap the chambermaids, how we kick old casual parts Boutin around if he fails to deliver the respect due to us. She's a little devil, I tell you, full of feeling and dignity....Hey, you're not sure what all this is about, are you?

ME: I confess I have no idea how to sort out whether you're speaking in good faith or maliciously. I'm a decent man, so be good enough to deal with me directly and put away your art.

HIM: That's just what we say to the little Hus girl about Dangeville and Clairon, mixing in a few words here and there to rouse your suspicions. I don't mind your taking me for a rascal, but not for an idiot. And only an idiot or a man hopelessly in love could say so many outrageous things seriously.

ME: But how does one bring oneself to say such things?

HIM: That doesn't happen all at once — one gets there gradually. *Ingenii largitor venter [The belly incites genius]*

ME: You have to be forced into it by a savage hunger.

HIM: That could do it. However, no matter how extreme these things seem to you, you should know that those to whom they are addressed are much more accustomed to hearing them than we are to trying them out.

ME: Is there anyone out there who has the courage to share your opinion?

HIM: What do mean anyone? It's the opinion and the language of all society.

ME: Those among you who are not great rascals have to be great fools.

HIM: Fools among us? I swear there is only one fool — and that's the one who gives us a good time in exchange for our imposing this language on him.

ME: But how can anyone let himself be so crudely imposed upon? For in the end the superior talent of Dangeville and Clairon is well established.

HIM: We swallow whole the lie which flatters us and sip drop by drop a truth set down before us. Besides, we have such an earnest and truthful demeanour.

ME: Nonetheless, you must have sinned at least once against the principles of your art and let slip inadvertently some of those bitter truths which hurt. For despite the wretched, abject, vile and abominable role you play, I think that basically you have a refined soul.

HIM: In my case, not at all. The Devil take me if I have any idea what I am deep down. In general, my mind is as round as a ball and my character as open as a wicker chair — I'm never false if I have any interest in being truthful and never truthful if I have any interest in being dishonest. I say things as they come to me. If they're sensible, all well and good, if impertinent, people don't worry about it. I use my candour in speaking to the full. I've never thought about my life before speaking or while I'm talking, or after I've finished talking. In that way I don't hurt anyone.

ME: But that's just what happened to you with those respectable people whose house you lived in and who were so kind to you.

HIM: What about it? It was unfortunate, a bad moment. These things happen in life. No happiness lasts. I was too well off. It couldn't last. We have, as you know, the most numerous and exclusive company. It's a school

for humanity, the renewal of ancient hospitality. All the fallen poets, we gather them up. We had Palissot after his *Zara*, Bret after *Le Faux généreux*, all the discredited musicians, all the authors no one reads any more, all the actresses hissed off the stage, all the booed actors, a pile of poor disgraced people, dull parasites. I have the honour of being at their head, the brave chief of a timid band. I'm the one who urges them to eat the first time they come. I'm the one who demands they get something to drink. They take up so little room! Some ragged young people who don't know where to lay their heads but who are good looking. Others are villains who suck up to the master and send him off to sleep so they can scoop up what he's left with the lady of the house. We appear carefree, but at bottom we're all moody and greedy. Wolves are no hungrier than we are, nor are tigers more cruel. We cram ourselves like wolves when the earth has been covered in snow for a long time, and, like tigers, we rip apart anything which has succeeded. Sometimes the crowds of Bertin, Montsauge, and Villemorien come together, and then there's a fine old noise in the menagerie. You've never seen so many wretched creatures in one place — cantankerous, harmful, and angry. No one hears anything but the names of Buffon, Duclos, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Votaire, D'Alembert, Diderot, and God only knows what epithets are attached to them. No one can have any wit unless he is as stupid as we are. That's the place where the plan for the comedy *Les Philosphes* was conceived — I'm the one who came up with the scene of the peddler. I based it on *La Théologie en Quenouille*. You don't get off the hook in it, any more than anyone else.

ME: So much the better. Perhaps you're giving me more honour than I deserve. I'd be humiliated if those who speak badly about so many expert and decent people decided to say something good about me.

HIM: There are many of us, and each one must pay his dues. After the sacrifice of the great animals we immolate the others.

ME: Insulting science and virtue in order to make a living — that's really expensive bread.

HIM: I've already told you we have no effect. We could injure the entire world, and we wouldn't hurt anyone. Sometimes our company includes the peasant Abbé d'Olivet, the fat Abbé Le Blanc, and the hypocrite Batteux. The fat abbé is malicious only before he's eaten. Once he's had his coffee, he throws himself into an armchair, rests his feet against the shelf by the chimney, and goes to sleep like an old parrot on its perch. If the noise gets violent, he yawns, stretches his arms, rubs his eyes, and says, "All right, what's up What is it?" "We're trying to find out if Piron has more wit than Voltaire." "Let's get this straight — are you talking about wit? It's not a question of taste, for your Piron has no notion of taste." "No idea at all?" "No." And then we set out on a discussion of taste. Then our patron signals with his hand that we should listen to him, because he's keener on taste than on anything, "Taste," he says, "taste is something..." — my goodness I've no idea what he said it was, and neither does he. Sometimes our friend Robbé is with us. He amuses us with cynical stories, miracles about people in convulsions where he was a visual witness, and also with a few cantos from his poem on a subject which he knows really well. I hate his verses, but I like to hear him recite. He has the air of someone truly weird. All those around him cry out, "Now that's what we call a poet." Just between us, that poetry is nothing but a din of all sorts of confused noises, the barbarous song of people living in the tower of Babel. Sometimes we also get a visit from a certain simpleton with a dull, stupid expression, who has a mind like a demon and who's smarter than an old monkey. He's one of those figures who invite jokes and tricks, someone God made to correct

people who judge on the basis of appearances, those who should have learned at their own mirrors that it is just as easy to be a witty man and look like a fool as it is to hide a fool under an intelligent looking physiognomy. It's a really common form of cowardice to sacrifice a good man for the amusement of others. And they never fail to go after this man. He's a trap we set for the new arrivals, and I've hardly seen a single one of them fail to get caught.

I was sometimes surprised by the justice of this fool's observations on men and on their characters. I told him as much. "Well," he replied, "it's a matter of getting some benefits out of bad company, just like out of being a libertine. You get compensation for the loss of innocence by also losing your prejudices. In a society of bad people, where vice shows itself with its mask removed, you learn to recognize it. And besides, I've read a bit."

ME: What have you read?

HIM: I've read, I read, and I constantly re-read Theophrastus, La Bruyère and Molière.

ME: Those are excellent books.

HIM: They are much better than people think, but who knows how to read them?

ME: Everyone, according to how intelligent he is.

HIM: Hardly anyone. Could you tell me what people are looking for in those books?

ME: Amusement and instruction.

HIM: What instruction? That's the point.

ME: A knowledge of one's duties, a love of virtue, and a hatred of vice.

HIM: Well, I gather from them everything one should do and everything which one shouldn't say. So when I read *L'Avare*, I say to myself: be a miser, if you want to, but be careful not to talk like a miser. When I read *Tartuffe* I tell myself: be a hypocrite, if you like, but don't talk like a hypocrite. Keep the vices which are useful, but don't assume a tone or an appearance which will make you ridiculous. In order to be sure about this tone and appearance, you have to know them. Now, these authors have provided excellent portraits of them. I am myself, and I remain what I am. But I act and speak in a way that's suitable. I'm not one of those people who disparage the moralists. One can profit a lot from them, above all from those who have put morals into action. Vice doesn't hurt people, except now and then. But the visible features of vice injure them from morning to night. Perhaps it would be better to be a scoundrel than to look like one — insolence in a character is only insulting from time to time, but an insolent appearance is always insulting. As for the rest, don't go and imagine that I'm the only reader of this sort. I've no particular merit in this, except that I've done systematically, with a keen intelligence and a reasonable and true aim in mind, what most others do by instinct. That's the reason why what they read doesn't make them better than me and why they continue to be ridiculous in spite of themselves — whereas I'm ridiculous only when I choose to be, and then I leave them far behind me. For the same art which at certain times teaches me to save myself from being ridiculous also teaches me at other times to make myself ridiculous in a superior way. Then I recall everything other people have said, everything I've read, and I add to those everything from my own capital funds, which in this type of thing are a surprisingly rich resource.

ME: You've done well to reveal these mysteries to me. Without that I would've thought you were contradicting yourself.

HIM: No, I don't to that at all. Fortunately, for one occasion when it's necessary to avoid ridicule there are a hundred where one has to be ridiculous. There's no better role to play in the presence of grand people that that of the fool. For a long time there was an official jester to the king, but there has never been an official wise man to the king. Me, I'm a fool for Bertin and many others, perhaps for you at this moment, or perhaps you're my fool. A man who wanted to be wise would not have such a fool. That's why anyone who has a fool is not wise. If he's not wise, he's a fool and perhaps, if he's a king, his fool's fool. Beyond this, you should remember than in a subject as varied as morals, there's no absolute, essential, universal truth or falsity, unless it's the fact that one has to be what one's self-interest wants one to be, good or bad, wise or foolish, decent or ridiculous, honest or vicious. If by chance virtue had led the way to a fortune, either I'd have been virtuous or I'd have pretended to be virtuous, just like anyone else. People wanted me to be ridiculous, and that's what I've made myself. As for viciousness, nature alone paid the cost of that. When I say vicious, it's in order to speak your language, for if we were to come to an understanding of each other, it could turn out that you call vice what I call virtue and virtue what I call vice. We also had among us authors from the Opera Comique, their actors and actresses, and more often their managers Corby, Moette...all resourceful people of superior merit. And I was forgetting the great literary critics. *L'Avant-Coureur*, *Les Petites Affiches*, *L'Année littéraire*, *L'Observateur littéraire*, *Le Censeur hebdomadaire* — all that clique of columnists.

ME: *L'Année littéraire*; *L'Obervateur littéraire* — that's not possible. They detest each other.

HIM: That's true. But all beggars are reconciled at the feeding trough. That damned *Obervateur littéraire* — I wish the devil had taken the man and his columns. It's that little cur of an avaricious priest, that stinking usurer, who's the cause of my disaster. He appeared on our horizon for the first time yesterday. He arrived at the hour which drives us all out of our hide outs — dinner time. When the weather is bad, anyone among us who has a twenty four sou coin in his pocket for cab fare is a happy man. Some people make fun of a fellow beggar who arrives in the morning with mud up to his ribs and soaked to the bone — and then in the evening have to return home in the same condition. There was one of them — I don't know which one — who a few months ago had a violent tangle with the Savoyard peasant who had set up at our door. They were running on credit, and the creditor wanted the debtor to settle up, but the latter didn't have the money. Well, they serve the meal, and honour the abbé, by placing him at the head of the table. I come in. I notice him. So I say to him, "Well, abbé, so you're presiding today? That's fine for today, but tomorrow you move down one setting, if you please, and the day after tomorrow to the next place setting, and thus from place to place, either to the left or right, until you move from that place which I've occupied once before you, Freron once after me, Dorat once after Freron, Palissot once after Dorat, and come to rest beside me, a poor dull bugger like yourself, *qui siedo sempre come un maestoso cazzo fra duoi coglioni*." The abbé, who's a good little devil and takes everything well, began to laugh. Mademoiselle was struck by the truth of my observation and the justice of my comparison, and she began to laugh. All those who were seated to the right and to the left of the abbé and whom he had moved down one notch began to laugh. So everyone was laughing except Monsieur who was irritated and went at me with things which wouldn't have mattered at all if we'd been alone: "Rameau you're an impudent man." "I know that — that's why you receive me here." "A

scoundrel.” “Just like the others.” “A beggar.” “Would I be here if I weren’t?” “I’ll see to it that you’re thrown out.” “After dinner, I’ll leave on my own.” “I’d advise you to do that.” So we ate, and I didn’t miss a bite. After we’d eaten well and drank a good deal, because, after all, it wouldn’t have mattered one way or the other — Mr. Guts is someone whom I’ve never avoided — I made my decision and was preparing to leave. I’d given my word in the presence of so many people that I had to keep it. I was prowling around the apartment for a long time, looking for my walking stick and my hat in places where they wouldn’t be, all the time counting on the fact that my patron would let out a new torrent of abuse, that someone would intervene, and that we’d finish up by being reconciled because we’d lost our tempers. I wandered round, I kept wandering around, for I wasn’t feeling anything inside, but my patron, well, he was blacker and grimmer than Homer’s Apollo when he fired his arrows down on the Greek army. He was walking back and forth, with his hat pulled down more than usual and his fist on his chin. Mademoiselle came up to me. “But Mademoiselle, what’s been so extraordinary, then? Have I been any different today from my usual self?” “I wish him to leave.” “I will leave. I haven’t done him any wrong.” “Excuse me, but Monsieur l’Abbé was invited, and...” “He let himself down by inviting the abbé and then letting me in and with me so many other hangers-on like me.” “Come on, my dear Rameau. You must apologize to Monsieur l’Abbé.” “I don’t want his pardon...” “Come on, come on — all this will sort itself out.” They took me by the hand and dragged me towards the abbé’s armchair. I held out my arms. I looked at the abbé with a sort of admiration, for who had ever made an apology to the abbé? “Abbé,” I said to him, “abbé, all this is really silly, isn’t it?” And then I started to laugh, and so did he. So right there I was forgiven in that quarter. But I had to tackle the other one, and what I had to say to him was a different game altogether. I don’t know much about how I framed my

apology. “Monsieur, look at this fool...” “He’s been making me suffer for too long. I don’t want to hear any more talk about him.” “Monsieur is angry.” “Yes, I am very angry.” “That won’t happen any more.” “Well, the first scoundrel...” I don’t know if he was in one of his moody days when Mademoiselle is afraid to go near him and doesn’t dare touch him except with velvet mitts or whether he misheard what I was saying or whether I spoke badly, but things got worse than before. To hell with it — doesn’t he know me? Doesn’t he know that I’m like a child and there are situations where I just let everything go under me? And then, God forgive me, I thought I’d never have a rest from performing. Even a puppet made of steel gets worn out if the strings are pulled from morning to night and from night until morning. I must relieve them of their boredom — I take that for granted — but I have to amuse myself sometimes. In the middle of this mess, a fatal thought went through my mind, an idea which made me arrogant and inspired me with pride and insolence: it was the notion that they couldn’t do without me, that I was someone indispensable.

ME: Yes, I think you’re very useful to them, but they’re even more so to you. You won’t find a house as good as that one, when you want to, but those people, if they’re missing one fool, can come up with a hundred.

HIM: A hundred fools like me! Mister Philosopher, they’re not as common as that. Yes, some insipid fools. It’s harder to find quality in foolishness than in talent or virtue. I’m a rare member of my species, yes, very rare. Now that they don’t have me any more, what are they doing? They’re as bored as dogs. I’m an inexhaustible sack of impertinence. At every moment I had a joke which made people laugh until they cried. For them I was an entire house of idiots.

ME: So that's why you had table, bed, coat, vest, trousers, shoes, and a small allowance.

HIM: Well, that's the good side. That's the profit. But what about the charges — you don't say a word about those. First, if there was a rumour about a new play, no matter what the weather, I had to poke my nose in all the attics in Paris until I found the author. Then I had to find a way to read the work and to insinuate skillfully that there was role in it which would be performed extremely well by someone I knew. "By whom, if you please?" "By whom — a good question! Someone with grace, charm, and delicacy." "You mean Mademoiselle Dangeville? Do you know her by any chance?" "Yes, a little. But it's not her." "Then who?" I'd say her name in a low voice. "Her!" "Yes, her," I'd repeat, somewhat ashamed, for there are times I feel a sense of modesty, and when I repeated the name you should've seen the poet make a long face or at other times blow up in a temper right in front of me. However, for better or worse I had to bring my man to dinner — and he didn't want to get involved. He'd stall and offer his thanks. You should've seen how I was treated if I didn't succeed in my negotiations with him: I was a lout, a fool, an oaf. I was good for nothing. I wasn't worth the glass of water they'd given me to drink. But it was even worse if she got the part — then I had to go fearlessly through the midst of the booing public (and they're good judges, no matter what people say about them) and make my applause heard as a one-man claque. I attracted people's attention and sometimes stole the booing away from the actress. I'd hear people whispering beside me, "It's a valet in disguise, one of those belonging to the man who sleeps with her. Won't the rascal ever shut up?" People have no idea what could make a person do that. They think it's stupidity; whereas it comes from a motive that excuses everything.

ME: Up to and including breaking the laws.

HIM: Finally, however, I became known, and people said, “Oh, it’s Rameau.” My only option was to throw out some ironic expression to salvage the ridicule of my solitary applause so that people would interpret it as its opposite. You have to admit that it takes a powerful interest to brave the assembled public like that and the effort is worth more than one small écu.

ME: Why didn’t you get some help?

HIM: I’ve done that, too. I earned a bit of money from it. Before going into the torture chamber, we had to memorize some brilliant passages where we had to set the tone. If I happened to forget them or got confused, there was a real earthquake when I returned. You’ve no idea the kind of fuss they made. And then in the house there was a pack of dogs to look after. It’s true that I’d taken on this job — like a fool. And then I had to take care of the cats. And I was only too happy if Micou favoured me with a claw scratch which ripped my cuff or my hand. Criquette is subject to colic, and it’s my job to rub her belly. Previously Mademoiselle had vapours. Now it’s nerves. I’m not mentioning the other slight indispositions which no one bothered about in front of me. Those were all right. I’ve never believed in too much formality. I’ve read, I don’t know where, that a prince known as The Great used to rest sometimes leaning against the back of his mistress’s toilet commode. People act relaxed around their familiars, and in those days I was more familiar than anyone. I’m the apostle of familiarity and relaxation. I preached them there by example, without anyone objecting to me. They just had to let me be. I’ve given you a sketch of my patron. Mademoiselle is beginning to put on weight, and you should hear the fine stories people make of that.

ME: You’re not one of those people, are you?

HIM: Why not?

ME: At the very least it's indecent to make your benefactors sound ridiculous.

HIM: But isn't it even worse to let your good deeds give you an excuse to discredit your protégé?

ME: If the protégé wasn't vile on his own, nothing would give his protector such a right.

HIM: But if these people weren't ridiculous in themselves, one couldn't make up good stories about them. And then is it my fault if they become vulgar? Is it my fault, once they've become vulgar, if people betray and ridicule them? If they decide to live with people like us and have any common sense, they have to expect all sorts of dark stuff. People who take up with us, surely they know us for what we are, for self-interested souls — vile and two-timing? If they understand us, then everything's fine. There is a tacit agreement that they'll provide good things for us and sooner or later we'll pay back the good they've done us with something bad. Isn't this the agreement that exists between a man and his pet monkey or parrot? Brun cries out that Palissot, his guest and friend, has written some couplets attacking him. Palissot had to compose the couplets, and it's Brun who's in the wrong. Poinsinet cries out that Palissot has ascribed to him the couplets he wrote against Brun. But Palissot had to ascribe to Poinsinet the couplets he wrote attacking Brun, and it's Poinsinet who's in the wrong. The little Abbé Rey cries out that his friend Palissot has snatched away his mistress after he introduced her to him. But he shouldn't have introduced someone like Pallisot to his mistress if he wasn't prepared to lose her. Palissot did his duty, and it's Abbé Rey who is in the wrong. The bookseller David cries out because his associate Palissot has slept with or wanted to sleep with his

wife. The wife of the bookseller David cries out that Palissot has told anyone willing to listen that he has slept with her. Whether Palissot has slept with the bookseller's wife or not is difficult to determine, because the wife's duty was to deny the fact and Palissot could've let people believe what was not true. Whatever the case, Palissot played his role, and it's David and his wife who are in the wrong. Helvitius may cry out that Palissot slanders him by putting him in a scene as a dishonest man, but Palissot still owes him the money he borrowed for the medical treatment for his bad health, as well as for his food and clothing. But should Helvetius have expected any other treatment from a man soiled with all sorts of infamy, a man who for fun makes his friend swear off his religion, who appropriates the assets of his partners, who has no faith, law, or feeling, who runs after fortune *per fas et nefas*, who measures his days by the acts of villainy he commits, and who has even lampooned himself on stage as one of the most dangerous rascals — a piece of impudence I believe we've not seen in the past and won't see in the future? No. So it's not Palissot but Helvetius who's in the wrong. If one takes a young man from the provinces to the zoo at Versailles and his foolishness persuades him to stick his hand through the bars of the tiger's or panther's cage, and if the young man leaves his arm behind in the throat of the ferocious animal, who's in the wrong? All that is written in the tacit agreement. Too bad for the man who doesn't know that or who forgets it. How many of those people accused of viciousness I could justify by appealing to this universal and sacred pact, whereas people should accuse themselves of stupidity. Yes, you fat countess, you're the one in the wrong when you gather around you what people of your sort call "characters," and when these "characters" play dirty tricks on you and you do the same, thus exposing yourself to the resentment of decent people. Honest people do what they ought to do, so do your "characters." And it's your fault for having collected them. If Bertinhus

lived quietly and peacefully with his mistress, if through the honesty of their characters they'd made the acquaintance of decent people, they'd have summoned round them men of talent, people known in society for their virtue. If they'd reserved for a small enlightened select group hours of entertainment taken from the sweet life they had together loving each other in the quiet of their retreat, do you think people would have made up stories about them, good or bad? So then what happened to them? They got what they deserved. They've been punished for their imprudence. And we're the ones whom Providence has destined from all eternity to bring justice to the Bertins of today. And it's people like us among our descendants who are destined to bring justice to the Montsauges and Bertins of the future. But while we execute the decrees of justice on stupidity, you paint us as we are and carry out these just decrees against us. What would you think of us, if, with our disgraceful habits, we claimed that we enjoyed popular favour? You'd say we were out of our minds. And those who expect decent treatment from people born vicious, from vile and base characters, are they wise? Everything in this world receives its due. There are two public prosecutors. The one by your door punishes the criminal offences against society. Nature is the other. She recognizes all the vices which escape the laws. You devote yourself to debauchery with women. You'll get dropsy. You're a scoundrel. You'll get consumption. You open your door to rascals, and you live with them. You'll be betrayed, mocked, and despised. The simplest thing to do is to resign yourself to the equity of these judgments and tell yourself that it's all right. Then you can shake your ears and change your ways, or else stay as you are, but on the conditions mentioned above.

ME: You're right.

HIM: In fact, about these bad stories — I don't myself make any of them up. I stick to the role of peddler. They say that a few days ago, at five

o’clock in the morning, people could hear a really violent noise. All the house bells were in motion. There were stifled and broken cries of a man choking. “Help, help. I’m being suffocated. I’m dying.” These cries came from the apartment of my patron. People arrived. They went to help him. That fat creature of ours had lost her mind and was no longer aware of what she was doing — which sometimes happens at such moments. She kept speeding up her movements — raising herself on her two hands so that from higher up she could let fall on his casual parts her weight of two or three hundred pounds, energized with all the speed provided by furious desire. They had a lot of difficulty getting him out from under. What a devilish fantasy for a little hammer to place himself under a heavy anvil!

ME: You’re too naughty. Speak about something else. Since we’ve been talking, I’ve had a question on the tip of my tongue.

HIM: Why has it stayed there so long?

ME: I was afraid it might be indiscreet.

HIM: After the things I’ve just shown you, I don’t know what secret I could conceal from you.

ME: You have no doubts about how I judge your character.

HIM: None whatsoever. In your eyes I’m a very abject person, very contemptible, and I’m also sometimes just the same in my own eyes, but rarely. I congratulate myself on my vices more often than I criticize myself for them.

ME: That’s true, but why show me all your nastiness?

HIM: Well, first because you know a good deal about it already, and I saw that there's more to win than to lose by confessing the rest to you.

ME: Please tell me how that works.

HIM: If it's important to be sublimely good at anything, it's above all necessary with being bad. People spit on a petty cheat, but they can't hold back a certain respect for a grand criminal. His courage astonishes you. His atrocity makes you tremble. In everything, people value integrity of character.

ME: But this worthy integrity of character, you don't yet have it. From time to time I find you vacillating in your principles. It's uncertain whether you hold to your nastiness from nature or from study, or if study has taken you as far as it's possible to go.

HIM: I agree with that. But I've done my best. Haven't I had the modesty to recognize beings more perfect than myself? Haven't I spoken to you about Bouret with the most profound admiration? Bouret, in my view, is the greatest man in the world.

ME: But immediately after Bouret, there's you.

HIM: No.

ME: Then it's Palissot?

HIM: It's Palissot, but it's not only Palissot.

ME: And who could be worthy of sharing second place with him?

HIM: The renegade from Avignon.

ME: I've never heard mention of this renegade of Avignon, but he must be a really astonishing man.

HIM: That he is.

ME: The history of great people has always interested me.

HIM: That I can believe. This one used to live with a good and honest descendant of Abraham — the one who was promised he'd be father of the faithful and they'd be as numerous as the stars.

ME: He lived with a Jew?

HIM: With a Jew. He began by winning the Jew's sympathy and then his good will, and finally his total confidence. That's how it always goes. We count so much on the effects of our kindnesses that we rarely hide a secret from someone we've buried in our good deeds. It's impossible to have no ungrateful people when we expose men to the temptation of being ungrateful with impunity. This perceptive idea is one our Jew did not think about. So he confided to the renegade that he could not in good conscience eat pork. Now you're going to see the advantages a creative mind can derive from this confession. A few months went by, during which our renegade strengthened the bond between them. When he thought that the Jew was totally won over and truly caught, that his attentions had completely convinced him that he didn't have a better friend in all the tribes of Israel...You have to admire the man's circumspection. He didn't hurry. He lets the pear grow ripe before he shakes the branch. Too much eagerness could've ruined his project. Usually greatness of character comes from a natural balance of several contrasting qualities.

ME: Leave your reflections and go on with your story.

HIM: That's not possible. There are days when I have to reflect. It's a sickness which has to be left to run its course. Where was I?

ME: At the well established intimacy between the Jew and the renegade.

HIM: So the pear was ripe...But you're not listening to me. What are you dreaming about?

ME: I'm dreaming about the unevenness of your style — sometimes lofty, sometimes low.

HIM: Can the style of a vicious man be unified? He comes one night to the home of his good friend, with an agitated air, his voice broken, his face pale as death, trembling in all his limbs. "What's the matter with you?" "We're lost." "Lost? How?" "Lost, I'm telling you, lost without hope." "Explain yourself." "Wait a minute until I get over my fear." "Come on, pull yourself together," the Jew said to him, instead of saying, "You're an incorrigible scoundrel. I don't know what you have to tell me, but you're an incorrigible scoundrel. You're pretending to be terrified."

ME: And why should he have spoken to him like that?

HIM: Because the man was a liar and had gone too far. That's clear to me, so don't interrupt me any more. "We're lost, lost without hope." Don't you sense the affectation in the repetition of the word*lost*? "A traitor has denounced us to the Holy Inquisition — you as a Jew and me as a renegade, as a disgusting renegade." Observe how the traitor was not embarrassed to use the most odious expressions. It requires more courage than people think to call yourself by your proper name. You have no idea what it costs to get to that point.

ME: Of course not. But what about this disgusting renegade...?

HIM: He's a liar, but it's a really adroit lie. The Jew gets scared. He pulls his beard. He rolls on the ground. He sees the guard at his door. He sees himself dressed in the San Benito and his own*auto-da-fe* being prepared. "My friend, my dear friend, my only friend, what do we do?" "What do we do? You show yourself, you affect the greatest self-confidence, go on with your business as usual. The procedures of this tribunal are secret, but slow. You must use the delay to sell everything. I'll charter a ship or I'll get a third party to do it — yes, a third party, that'll be better. We'll put your fortune in it, because it's mainly your fortune they want, and we'll go, you and I, to seek under another sky the liberty to serve our God and to follow in safety the law of Abraham and our conscience. The important point in these perilous circumstances we find ourselves in is not to do anything imprudent." No sooner said that done. The ship is chartered, loaded with provisions and sailors. The Jew's fortune is on board. The next day, at dawn, they're going to set sail. They can dine happily and sleep soundly. The next day, they'll escape their persecutors. During the night the renegade gets up, steals the Jew's wallet, his purse, and his jewels, goes on board, and sails away. And you think that's all there is to it? If so, you haven't got the point. When I was told this story, I guessed what I haven't yet told you, to test your intelligence. You've done well to be a respectable man — you wouldn't have been anything but a petty rogue. And up to this point, the renegade has been only that — a miserable wretch whom no one would want to be like. But the supreme part of his wickedness is that he had himself denounced his good friend the Israelite. The Holy Inquisition seized him when he got up and, some days later, turned him into a fine bonfire. That's how the renegade became the peaceful possessor of the fortune of this cursed descendant of those who crucified Our Saviour.

ME: I don't know which gives me greater horror — the evil of your renegade or your style of speaking about him.

HIM: That's the very thing I was telling you. The atrocity of the action takes you beyond contempt, and that's the reason why I'm so sincere. I wanted you to understand how I excelled in my art and to pull out of you the admission that I was at least original in my degradation. I wanted to give you the idea that I belonged in the line of great scoundrels and then to shout to myself, "*Vivat Mascarillus, fourbum imperator!*" *["Long live Mascarillus, emperor of the rogues"]* Come, Mr. Philosopher, sing along, "*Vivat Mascarillus, fourbum imperator!*"

At that point he began to sing a really extraordinary fugue. Sometimes the melody was serious and full of majesty; sometimes light and playful. At one moment he imitated the bass, at another one of the upper parts. He indicated to me with his outstretched arms and neck the places with held notes and performed and made up on his own a song of triumph. It showed that he knew more about good music than about good habits.

As for me, I didn't know if I ought to remain or run away, to laugh or grow indignant. I stayed, intending to steer the conversation onto some subject which would rid my soul of the horror filling it. I was starting to find it difficult to endure the presence of a man who talked about a horrible action, a hideous crime, like a connoisseur of painting or poetry examining the beauties of a tasteful work or like a moralist or historian selecting and emphasizing the circumstances of a heroic action. I became gloomy, in spite of myself. He noticed that and spoke to me.

HIM: What's the matter? Are you feeling ill?

ME: A little. But it will pass.

HIM: You have the worried look of a man upset about some distressing idea.

ME: That's it.

After a moment of silence on his part and mine, during which he walked around whistling and singing, to get him back to his talent I said to him: "What are you doing at present?"

HIM: Nothing.

ME: That very tiring.

HIM: I was already stupid enough. Then I went to hear the music of Duni and other young composers, and that finished me off.

ME: So you approve of this style of music?

HIM: No doubt.

ME: You find beauty in these new melodies?

HIM: My God, do I find beauty in them? I'll say I do. What declamation! What truth! What expressiveness!

ME: Every art of imitation has its model in nature. What's the musician's model when he writes a tune?

HIM: Why not tackle the issue at a higher level? What's a melody?

ME: I confess to you that this question is beyond my capabilities. In that we're all alike. In our memory we have only words which we think we understand from our frequent use of them and even the correct way we

apply them. But in our minds they are only vague notions. When I say the word “melody,” I don’t have ideas any clearer than yours or those of the majority of people like you when they say “reputation,” “blame,” “honour,” “vice,” “virtue,” “modesty,” “decency,” “shame,” “ridicule.”

HIM: A melody is an imitation using the sounds of a scale invented by art or inspired by nature, whichever you like, either with the voice or with an instrument, an imitation of the physical sounds or accents of passion. You see that, by changing some things in this definition, it would fit exactly a definition of painting, oratory, sculpture, and poetry. Now, to get to your question. What’s the musician’s model or the model of a melody? It’s declamation, if the model is alive and thinking; it’s noise, if the model is inanimate. You must think of declamation as a line, and the melody as another line which winds along the first. The more this declamation, the basis of the melody, is strong and true, the more the melody which matches it will intersect it in a greater number of points. And the truer the melody, the more beautiful it will be. That’s something our young musicians have understood really well. When one hears *Je suis un pauvre diable*, one thinks one can recognize the sad cry of a miser. If he wasn’t singing, he would speak to the earth in the same tones when he entrusts his gold to it, saying, *O terre, reçois mon trésor*. And that little girl who feels her heart beating, who blushes, who’s confused, and who begs the gentleman to let her go — would she express herself any differently? In these works there are all sorts of characters, an infinite variety of declamations. That’s sublime — I’m the one telling you this. Go on, go on and listen to the piece where the young man who feels himself dying, cries out, *Mon coeur s’en va*. Listen to the song. Listen to the instrumental accompaniment, and then tell me what difference there is between the real actions of a man who’s dying and the form of the melody. You’ll see whether the line of the melody coincides completely with the line of the declamation or not. I’m not going to talk to

you about measure, which is another condition of melody. I'm confining myself to the expression, and there is nothing more obvious than the following passage which I read somewhere — *musices seminarium accentus*. Accent is the breeding ground of melody. Judge from that just how difficult and how important it is to know how to deal with recitative well. There is no fine tune from which one cannot make a fine recitative, and no fine recitative from which a expert cannot derive a fine tune. I wouldn't want to guarantee that someone who recites well will also sing well, but I would be surprised if a person who sings well didn't know how to recite well. And you should believe everything I've said about this, because it's the truth.

ME: I'd like nothing better than to believe you, if I were not held back by one small difficulty.

HIM: And this difficulty?

ME: Well, it's this — if this music is sublime, then the music of Lully, Campra, Destouches, Mouret, and even, just between us, your dear uncle must be a little dull.

HIM: *[coming close and whispering in my ear]* I don't wish to be overheard, for there are plenty of people who know me around here. But their music is dull. It's not that I concern myself much about my dear uncle, if he's "dear" at all. He's a stone. He could look at me with my tongue hanging out a foot and he wouldn't give me a glass of water. But he's done well with the octave, with the seventh — tra la la, rum ti tum, too de loo — with a devilish noise. Still, those who are beginning to understand these things and who'll no longer accept this fussing about for music will never put up with that. There should be a police order forbidding anyone, no matter what their quality or condition, from having Pergolesi's *Stabat* sung.

This *Stabat* should have been burned by the public hangman. My God, these damned *Buffons [Italian writers of light opera]*, with their *Servante Maîtresse* and their *Tracollo* have given us a real kick in the ass. Previously a *Tancrède*, an *Issé*, a *Europe galante*, *les Indes*, *Castor*, and the *Talents lyriques* ran for four, five or six months. Performances of *Armide* went on for ever. Nowadays they fall down around each other, like a house of cards. And Rebel and Francoeur throw fuel on the flames, saying everything is lost, they're ruined, if people tolerate any longer this singing rabble from the circus our national music will go to the devil, and the Royal Academy in the cul-de-sac will have to close up shop. There's some truth in that. The old wigs who have been coming there for thirty or forty years every Friday, instead of enjoying themselves the way they used to in the past, are getting bored and yawning, without knowing why. They ask themselves the question but have no idea how to answer. Why don't they ask me? Duni's prediction will come true, and the way things are going, I'll eat my hat if, in four or five years after *Le Peintre amoureux de son Modèle,* there's a cat left to kick in the celebrated Impasse. Those good people, they've turned their backs on their own symphonies to play Italian symphonies. They thought they could train their ears for these without having any effect on their own vocal music, as if, except for the greater freedom afforded by the reach of the instrument and the mobility of the fingers, the symphony was not related to singing as singing is to real declamation. As if the violin were not the mimic of the singer, who one day will become the imitator of the violin, when what's difficult takes the place of what's beautiful. The first musician who played Locatelli was the apostle of the new music. That's so typical! We'll get accustomed to the imitation of the accents of passion or of natural phenomena by melody and voice, by instruments, because that's the whole extent and purpose of music. And will we retain our taste for robbery, lances, glories, triumphs, and victories? "*Go and see if they come, Jean*."

They imagined that they would laugh or cry at scenes from tragedy or comedy set to music, that the accents of fury, hate, jealousy, the true sorrows of love, the ironies, the jokes of the Italian or French theatre could be presented to their ears and they'd remain admirers of *Ragonde* and *Platée*. I tell you in reply taradiddle, boom boom. Even if they sensed, without interruption, with what ease, what flexibility, what tenderness the harmony, prosody, ellipses, and inversions of the Italian language lend themselves to art, movement, expression, turns of melody, and the measured value of sounds, they'd still remain ignorant of how their music is stiff, dead, heavy, ungainly, pedantic, and monotonous. Yes, yes. They've persuaded themselves that after having mixed their tears in with the crying of a mother who is desolated over the death of her son, after having trembled at the orders of a tyrant commanding a murder, they wouldn't be bored with their fairy land, their insipid mythology, their sugary little madrigals which display the bad taste of the poet as much as the poverty of the art which puts up with them. Such good people! It's not so and can't be. The true, the good, and the beautiful have their rights. One may argue with them, but in the end one admires them. What doesn't bear their stamp people admire for a while, but they end up by yawning. So yawn away, gentlemen, yawn to your heart's content. Don't be embarrassed. The gates of hell will never prevail against the imperial power of nature and my trinity. The true establishes itself gently — it's the father and gives birth to the good, who is the son, and from him comes the beautiful, which is the Holy Ghost. The strange god sets himself up humbly on the altar beside the idol of the country. Gradually, it gets stronger. One fine day it nudges its comrade with an elbow, and, bang crash, the idol is on the floor. They say that's how the Jesuits planted Christianity in China and India. And these Jansenists can say whatever they please, but the political method which

marches towards its goal quietly, without bloodshed, without martyrs, without a single tuft of hair being cut off, seems to me the best.

ME: There's some reason in everything you've just said.

HIM: Reason! So much the better. The devil take me if I've been trying to be reasonable. It just comes out somehow or other. I'm like the musicians at the Impasse when my uncle appeared. If I speak well it's because a boy from a coal mine will always speak better of his trade than an entire academy and all the Duhamels of this world.

And then there he goes walking around, humming some tunes from*l'Ile des Fous*, *Peintre amoureux de son Modèle*, *Maréchal-ferrant*, and *Plaideuse*. From time to time he lifted his hand and eyes to the sky and cried out. "Isn't that beautiful, by God? Isn't it beautiful? How could anyone have a pair of ears on his head and even raise such a question?" He began to get worked up and to sing very softly. As he grew even more impassioned, he raised his voice, and then there followed gestures, facial grimaces, and bodily contortions. I say, "All right, there he is off his head, getting some new scene ready." Then, in fact, he set off with a loud shout, "*I am a poor wretch...Monseigneur, Monseigneur, let me go...O earth, take my gold. Keep my treasure safe...My soul, my soul, my life, O earth!...There it is, my little friend. There's my little friend! Aspettare e non venire...A Zerbina penserete...Sempre in contrasti con te si sta...*" He crammed together and jumbled up together thirty songs — Italian, French, tragic, comic — in all sorts of different styles. Sometimes in a bass voice he went down all the way to hell, and sometimes he'd feign a falsetto and sing at the top of his voice, tearing into the high points of some songs, imitating the walk, deportment, gestures of the different singing characters, by turns furious, soft, imperious, sniggering. At one point, he's a young girl crying —

portraying all her mannerisms — at another point he's a priest, he's a king, he's a tyrant — he threatens, commands, loses his temper. He's a slave. He obeys. He calms down, he laments, he complains, he laughs — never straying from the tone, rhythm, or sense of the words or the character of the song.

All the men pushing wood had left their chess boards and gathered around him. The windows of the café were filled up on the outside by passers-by who'd been stopped by the sound. People gave out bursts of laughter strong enough to break open the ceiling. But he didn't notice a thing. He continued, in the grip of some mental fit, of an enthusiasm so closely related to madness that it's uncertain whether he'll come out of it. It might be necessary to throw him into a cab and take him straight to the lunatic asylum. As he was singing snatches from *Lamentations* by Jomelli, he brought out the most beautiful parts of each piece with precision, truth, and an incredible warmth. That beautiful recitative in which the prophet describes the desolation of Jerusalem he bathed in a flood of tears which brought tears to everyone's eyes. Everything was there — the delicacy of the song, the force of expression, the sorrow. He stressed those places where the composer had particularly demonstrated his great mastery. If he stopped the singing part, it was to take up the part of the instruments, which he left suddenly to return to the vocals, moving from one to the other in such a way as to maintain the connections and the overall unity, taking hold of our souls and keeping them suspended in the most unusual situation which I've ever experienced. Did I admire him? Oh yes, I admired him! Was I touched with pity? I was touched with pity. But a tinge of ridicule was mixed in with these feelings and spoiled them.

But you would've burst out laughing at the way in which he imitated the different instruments. With his cheeks swollen, all puffed out, and with

harsh, dark sounds he delivered the horns and bassoons. For the oboes he produced a shrill nasal tone, and then accelerated his voice with an amazing speed for the stringed instruments, trying to find the best approximations for their sounds. He whistled for the piccolos, warbled for the flutes, shouting, singing, carrying on like a maniac, acting out, by himself, the male and female dancers and singers, an entire orchestra, the whole musical company, dividing himself into twenty different roles, running, stopping, looking like a man possessed, frothing at the mouth. It was stiflingly hot, and the sweat running down the wrinkles in his forehead and down the length of his cheeks mixed in with the powder in his hair came down in streaks and lined the top of his coat. What didn't I see him do? He cried, he laughed, he sighed, he looked tender or calm or angry — a woman who was swooning in grief, an unhappy man left in total despair, a temple being built, birds calming down at sunset, waters either murmuring in a cool lonely place or descending in a torrent from the high mountains, a storm, a tempest, the cries of those who are going to die intermingled with the whistling winds, the bursts of thunder, the night, with its shadows — silent and dark — for sounds do depict even silence.

His mind was completely gone. Worn out with fatigue and looking like a man coming out of a deep sleep or a long trance, he stayed motionless, dazed, astonished. He directed his gaze around him, like someone disturbed who's trying to recognize where is. He was waiting for his energy and his spirit to return. Mechanically he wiped his face. Like someone who wakes up to see a large number of people surrounding his bed, totally forgetful of or profoundly ignorant about what's happened. He first cried out, "Well then, gentlemen, what's going on? Why are you laughing? What's so surprising? What's happening?" Then he added, "Now that's what people should call music and a musician. However, gentlemen, we should not deprecate certain pieces of Lully. I defy anyone to improve on the scene

‘*Ah! j’attendrai*’ without changing the words. We should not criticize some places in Campra, the violin pieces of my uncle, his gavottes, his entries for soldiers, priests, those carrying out the sacrifice....”*Pale torches, a night more frightening than shadows...God of Tartarus, God of Oblivion*.” At that point, his voice grew loud, he sustained the sounds. The neighbours came to their windows, and we stuffed our fingers in our ears. He added, “Here’s where we need lungs, a great organ, plenty of air. But before long it will be time to say yours sincerely good bye to Assumption, Lent, and Epiphany. They still don’t know what needs to be set to music and thus what’s appropriate for a composer. Lyric poetry has yet to be born. But they’ll get there, by hearing Pergolisi, the Saxon, Terradoglias, Trasetta and the rest — by reading Metastasio they’ll have to get there.”

ME: So Quinault, La Motte, and Fontenelle didn’t understand any of that?

HIM: Not for the new style. There aren’t six consecutive lines in all their charming poems which can be set to music. There are ingenious sentences, light madrigals, tender and delicate, but if you want to see how that’s a barren resource for our art, which is the most demanding of all — and I don’t except the art of Demosthenes — get someone to recite these pieces. You’ll find them so cold, listless, and monotonous. There’s nothing there which could serve as the basis for a melody. I’d sooner have La Rochefoucauld’s *Maxims* or Pascal’s *Pensées* set to music. The cry of animal passion should dictate the line which suits us. The expressive passages must follow each other closely. The phrasing must be brief, the sense cut off, suspended, so the musician can use the whole piece and each of its parts, leaving out a word or repeating it, adding a missing word, turning and re-turning it, like a polyp, without destroying it — all that makes French lyric poetry much harder than is the case with languages with inversions which in themselves offer all these advantages. *“Cruel*

barbarian, plunge your dagger in my breast. Here I am ready to receive the fatal blow! Strike. Dare....Oh, I faint, I die....A secret fire lights up my senses....Cruel love, what do you want with me...Leave me to the sweet peace I enjoyed... Give me my reason....” The passions must be strong. The tenderness of the composer and the poet should be extreme. The aria is almost always the peroration for the scene. We have to have exclamations, interjections, suspensions, interruptions, affirmations, negations — we call, we invoke, we cry out, we groan, we cry, we laugh openly. No wit, no epigrams, none of these neatly crafted thoughts. That’s too far from simple nature. And don’t go on thinking that the role playing of theatrical actors and their declamation can serve us as models. Bah! We need something more energetic, less mannered, more true. The straightforward language and common voice of passion are all the more necessary for us because our language is more monotonous and less stressed. The cry of an animal or a man in passion will provide them.

While he was saying these things to me, the crowd which had surrounded us had moved away, either because they couldn’t hear anything or were taking less interest in what he was saying. For in general human beings, like children, prefer to be amused than to be instructed. They’d gone back, each to his game, and we remained alone in our corner. Seated on a bench with his head leaning against the wall, his arms hanging down, and his eyes half-closed, he said to me, “I don’t know what’s the matter with me. When I came here, I was fresh and in good form. And now, here I am beaten up and shattered, as if I’d hiked thirty miles. Something came over me all of a sudden.”

ME: Would you like some refreshment?

HIM: Yes, I'd like that. I feel hoarse. I haven't got any energy, and my chest hurts a bit. It happens to me almost every day, just like that — I've no idea why.

ME: What would you like?

HIM: Whatever you like. I'm not hard to please. Poverty has taught me to adjust to everything.

They served us some beer and lemonade. He fills a large glass and drains it two or three times, one after the other. Then, like a man with renewed energy he coughs, moves around, and starts again.

"But in your view, my Master Philosopher, isn't it something really odd that a foreigner, an Italian, a Duni, should come to teach us how to use accents in our music, to adapt our melodies to all the movements, measures, intervals, all the forms of speech, without hurting our prosody? And yet it wasn't all that difficult to do, not like drinking the sea. Anyone who'd ever heard a beggar asking for a hand out in the street, a man carried away by anger, a jealous and furious woman, a despairing lover, a flatterer, yes, a flatterer, softening his voice, drawing out his syllables in a voice like honey — in short, anyone who'd ever heard passion of some sort or other, provided that its energy made it worthy of serving as a model for a composer, should have recognized two things: first, that the syllables, long or short, have no fixed length, nor even a set relationship between their lengths and, second, that passion uses prosody almost as it likes — it can work across the greatest intervals. A man who cries out in the depths of his grief, 'Ah, what an unhappy creature I am,' lifts the opening syllable of exclamation to the highest and shrillest note and brings the others down to the most solemn and low notes, going through the octave or an even greater interval, giving to each sound the quantity which suits the turn of the

melody, without offending the ear, and without either the long or the short syllables maintaining the length or brevity of normal speech. How far we've come since the time when we used to point to the parenthetical comments in *Armide*— "The conqueror of Renaud, if anyone can be" — or "Obey, don't hesitate" from *Indes galantes* — as amazing moments of musical expression! Right now these amazing moments make me shrug my shoulders with pity. The way art is improving, I don't know where it'll end up. So while we're waiting, let's have another drink."

He had two or three more drinks, without knowing what he was doing. He was going to drown himself without realizing it, as if he was totally exhausted, if I hadn't moved the bottle, which he kept looking for absent mindedly. Then I spoke to him.

ME: How is it that with such fine discrimination and such a strong sensibility for the beauties of musical art, you are also blind to the beautiful things in morality and equally insensible to the charms of virtue?

HIM: I suppose it's because there's a sense for some things which I lack, a fibre which I wasn't given, a loose fibre which one can pluck firmly but which will not vibrate, or perhaps it's because I've always lived among good musicians and bad people, so that it's made my ear become very refined and my heart deaf. And then there was something about heredity. My father's blood and my uncle's blood are the same. My blood is the same as my father's. My paternal molecule was hard and stubborn, and this damned first molecule has swallowed up the rest.

ME: Do you love your child?

HIM: Do I love the little savage? I'm crazy about him.

ME: Are you seriously concerned about stopping the effects in him of this damned paternal molecule?

HIM: I've been working on it — but without much effect, I think. If he's destined to become a good man, I won't do him any injury. But if the molecule wants him to become a scoundrel like his father, the troubles I've taken to make him a decent man could be very harmful. Education would work against the tendency of the molecule, and he'd be pulled apart, as if by two opposing forces, and would stagger all over the place along the road of life, as I seen in countless people, equally awkward in doing good or bad. Those are the ones we call "types" — which is the most frightening of all labels, because it indicates mediocrity and the final degree of contempt. A great scoundrel is a great scoundrel, but he's not a type. It would require an enormous length of time before the paternal molecule could reassert its mastery and take him to the state of perfect debasement where I am. He'd lose his best years. So I'm doing nothing about it at the moment. I'll let him come along. I'll keep my eye on him. He is already greedy, glib — a lazy thief and a liar. I'm afraid he's true to his heredity.

ME: Why not make a musician of him, so he'll be just like you?

HIM: A musician! A musician! Sometimes I look at him and grind my teeth, telling him, "If you ever learn a single note, I believe I'll wring your neck."

ME: And why on earth would you do that?

HIM: It doesn't lead to anything.

ME: It leads to everything.

HIM: Yes, when one excels, but who can promise himself that his child will excel? The odds are ten thousand to one that he'll be nothing but an unhappy scraper of strings, like me. You know, it would probably be easier to find a child suited to govern a kingdom, to make a great king, than one to make a great violin player.

ME: It seems to me that agreeable talents, even mediocre ones, among a people without morals, lost in debauchery and luxury, would enable a man to advance rapidly along the road to fortune. I myself once heard the following conversation between some sort of patron and a kind of protégé. The latter had been recommended to the former as a pleasant man who could be of service to him. "Sir, what do you know?" "I know mathematics passably well." "All right, but after you've taught mathematics ten or twelve years you'll be covered with mud from the streets of Paris and you'll be entitled to an income of between three and four hundred pounds." "I've studied our laws, and I'm well versed in our legal system." "If Puffendorf and Grotius were to return to earth, they'd die of hunger beside some road marker." "I know a lot about history and geography." "If there were parents who'd set their hearts on a good education for their children, your fortune would be made, but there are none." "I am a competent musician." "Well, why didn't you say so right away. Just to show you what you can gain from such a talent, I have a daughter. Come around every day between seven and seven-thirty in the evening until nine. You'll give her lessons, and I'll give you twenty-five louis per year. You'll have breakfast, lunch, and dinner with us. The rest of the day will belong to you. You can do with it whatever works to your benefit."

HIM: And what became of this man?

ME: If he'd been wise, he'd have made a fortune, which is the only thing you seem to think about.

HIM: No doubt. Gold, some gold. Gold is everything, and the rest, without gold, is nothing. So instead of cramming his head with fine maxims which he'd have to forget or else be nothing but a beggar, whenever I have a louis, which isn't often, I stand in front of him. I pull the louis out of my pocket. I show it to him with admiration. I raise my eyes to the ceiling. I kiss the louis right in front of him. And to make him understand even better the importance of this sacred coin, I stammer out the words, I point out to him with my finger everything one can acquire with this coin — a fine frock, a pretty hat, a tasty biscuit. Then I put the louis in my pocket. I walk around with pride. I lift up my coattails and strike my hand against my fob pocket, to make him understand that it's the coin in there that gives rise to the self-assurance he sees in me.

ME: One could do no better. What if it happens one day that, deeply impressed with the value of the louis...

HIM: I see where you're going. One has to close one's eyes to that.. There is no principle of morality which doesn't have some inconvenience. At the worst, one has a bad fifteen minutes, and then it's all over.

ME: Even after such courageous and such wise opinions, I continue to think that it would be good to make him a musician. I'd don't know any way one can get close to important people more quickly, pander to their vices, and make a profit from one's own.

HIM: It's true, but I have plans for a faster and more assured success. Oh, if the child were only a daughter! But since we can't do what we want, we have to take what comes and get the best we can from that. And for that,

one shouldn’t be stupid, like most fathers who give a Spartan education to a child destined to live in Paris. They couldn’t do any worse if they were intending to make their children unhappy. If education is poor, it’s the fault of my country’s customs, not mine. Whoever’s responsible, I want my son to be happy or, what amounts to the same thing, honoured, rich, and powerful. I know a few of the easiest ways to arrive at this goal, and I’ll teach him those early on. If you criticize me, you wise men, the mob and my child’s success will absolve me. He’ll have gold — I assure you — and if he has a lot of that, he won’t lack anything, not even your estimation and respect.

ME: You could be wrong.

HIM: Well then, he’ll go without, like plenty of other people.

In everything he said there were so many things one thinks about and acts upon but which one does not say. And, to tell you the truth, that’s the most remarkable difference between my man and most of those around us. He admitted the vices he had, which are those other men possess, but he wasn’t a hypocrite. He was neither more nor less abominable than they were. He was only more candid, more consistent, and sometimes more profound in his depravity. I trembled to think what his child could become with a teacher like him. It’s certain that after educational ideas so strictly tailored to our morality, he would go far, unless he was prematurely stopped along the way.

HIM: Come now, you needn’t be afraid. The important point, the difficult point which a father has to attend to above all is not so much to give his child vices that will make him wealthy or foolish behaviour that will make him valuable to great people — everyone does that, if not systematically, as I do, at least by example and in lessons — but to give him a sense of

proportion, the art of dodging shame, dishonour, and the law. Those are dissonances in the social harmony which he must know how to set up, prepare, and resolve. Nothing is so insipid as a sequence of perfect chords. There has to be something which acts as a spur, which breaks up the light and scatters its rays.

ME: That's very good. With this comparison you bring me back from morality to music, which I'd strayed from in spite of myself. I thank you for that, for, to be perfectly frank with you, I like you better as a musician than as a moralist.

HIM: But I'm very second-rate in music and much better as a moralist.

ME: I doubt it, but even if that were true, I'm a good man, and your principles are not the same as mine.

HIM: So much the worse for you. Ah, if I only had your talents.

ME: Leave my talents out of it. Let's get back to yours.

HIM: If only I knew how to express myself like you. But my way of speaking is such a devilish mixture — half from the people of the literary world, half from the street market.

ME: I speak badly. I only know how to speak the truth, and that's not always welcome, as you know.

HIM: But I envy your talent not because I want to speak the truth but in order to tell lies well. If I could write, do up a book, turn out a dedicatory epistle, intoxicate a fool with his own merit, insinuate myself close to women.

ME: In all that you're a thousand times more capable than I am. I wouldn't even be worthy to be your pupil.

HIM: How many great qualities wasted. And you aren't even aware of their value.

ME: I collect back everything I put into them.

HIM: If that were the case, you wouldn't have this coarse coat, this muslin vest, these wool socks, these thick shoes, and this ancient wig.

ME: I agree. One must be very inept if one is not rich after stopping at nothing to become wealthy. But the fact is there are people like me who do not consider riches the most precious thing in the world — strange people.

HIM: Very odd. We aren't born with this frame of mind. One has to acquire it, because it's not natural.

ME: Not natural to men?

HIM: No, not to men. Everything living, including human beings, seeks benefits for itself at the expense of whoever they belong to. And I'm sure that if I left the little savage to go his own way, without speaking to him about anything, he'd want to be richly clothed, splendidly fed, liked by men, and adored by women, and would like to gather round him all the fine things of life.

ME: If the little savage were left to himself so that he retained all his imbecility, uniting the little reason possessed by a child in the cradle with the passionate violence in a man thirty years old, he'd wring his father's neck and sleep with his mother.

HIM: That proves the need for a good education. Who'll argue about that? And what's a fine education if not one which leads to all sorts of pleasures, without danger and without inconvenience?

ME: I almost share you opinion, but let's not explore that.

HIM: Why not?

ME: Well, I'm afraid we may only appear to agree and, if we once enter into a discussion of the dangers and the difficulties which need to be avoided, we won't agree any more.

HIM: And what's the problem with that?

ME: Let's leave it, I'm telling you. For I know I could never teach you about these things and it's much easier for you to teach me about music — things I don't understand and you do. Dear Rameau, let's talk music. Tell me how it comes about that with your ability to feel, to remember and deliver the finest passages of the grand masters with the enthusiasm which inspires you and which you transmit to others, you've done nothing worth anything.

Instead of answering me, he began to shake his head. Then, raising his finger to the sky he added, "The star! My star! When nature made Leo, Vinci, Pergolese, and Duni, she smiled. She assumed an imposing and serious expression when she formed my dear uncle Rameau, whom people will call the Great Rameau for ten years and then, in a little while, won't mention any more. When nature did up his nephew, she made grimace after grimace, and then grimaced again." While he uttered these words, he made all sorts of faces — disgust, disdain, irony — and he seemed to be kneading in his fingers a piece of dough and smiling at the ridiculous shapes he made

with it. This done, he threw the misshapen idol far away from him and said, “That’s how nature made me and threw me away, alongside other idols, some with shriveled stomachs, short necks, huge eyes outside their heads, apoplectic, others with wry necks, wizened, with a vibrant eye and a hooked nose. All of them started to laugh when they saw me. And I put my two fists against my sides and exploded with laughter when I saw them, for fools and madmen amuse each other. They seek each other out. They attract each other. If, on my arrival here, I hadn’t found ready made the proverb which says “A fool’s money is the inheritance of a man with brains” I’d have invented it. I felt that nature had put what was legitimately mine into the safe keeping of these idols, so I devised thousands of ways of getting it back for myself.

ME: I know these methods. You’ve told me about them, and I admired them a lot. But with such resources, why haven’t you attempted creating a fine work of art?

HIM: That’s what a man of the world said to Abbé Le Blanc....The abbé replied, “The Marquise of Pompadour takes me by the hand, leads me right to the threshold of the Academy, and there she removes her hand. I fall down and break both my legs.” The man of the world answered him, “All right, abbé, you must get up and bash in the door with your head.” The abbé replied, “That what I tried to do, and do you know what happened to me? I got a bump on my forehead.”

After this little story, my man began to move around with his head held down and a pensive and demoralized expression. He sighed and wept. He was upset. Raising his hands and his eyes, he banged his head with his fist, hard enough to break his forehead or his fingers, and he added, “It seems to me that there could be something in there, but no matter how hard I knock

or shake it, nothing emerges." Then he began shaking his head and hitting his forehead again even more firmly, saying, "Either no one is in there or they won't answer."

A moment later, he took on a proud attitude. He raised his head, laid his right hand over his heart, walked along and said, "I feel. Yes, I do feel.." He imitated for me a man who was getting annoyed, who was indignant, who was feeling moved, who was issuing orders, who was begging. He improvised speeches of anger, sympathy, hatred, love. He sketched out passionate characters with a surprising delicacy and fidelity. Then he added, "That's it, I think. It's coming along. That's what it is to find a midwife who knows how to stimulate and bring on the labour pains and make the child emerge. When I'm alone, I take up my pen, intending to write. I bite my nails. I wear out my forehead. No good. Good night. The god is absent. I'd persuaded myself that I had some genius, but at the end of a line I read that I am a fool, a fool, a fool. But how does one feel, raise oneself, think, or describe anything with energy when one hangs out with people like those it's necessary to see in order to live, in the midst of the comments one makes and hears and gossip like this, 'Today the boulevard was charming. Did you hear the little Marmotte? She played enchantingly. Mr. Someone-or-Other has the most beautiful dappled grays in harness you could ever imagine. As for lovely Madame So-and-So, she's beginning to get past it. At the age of forty-five, does one have one's hair done like that? That young What's-her-name is covered with diamonds which didn't cost her much.' 'You mean to say which cost her a lot?' 'Not at all.' 'Where did you see her?' 'At *L'Enfant d'Arlequin perdu et retrouvé*. The scene of despair was acted out as never before. The Punch at the fair can really shout but has no finesse, no soul. Madame Such-and-Such has given birth to two children at once. Each father will have his own.' Do you think stuff like that spoken, repeated, and heard every day inspires and leads to great things?"

ME: No. It would be more worthwhile to shut yourself up in your attic, drink water, eat dry bread, and find your real self.

HIM: Perhaps. But I don't have the courage for that. And then to sacrifice one's happiness for an uncertain success. And what about the name I carry? Rameau! To be called Rameau — that's embarrassing. Talent is not like nobility which can be passed on and whose lustre increases as it goes from grandfather to father, from father to son, from son to grandson, without the grandparent requiring his descendant to have any merit. The old stock branches out into an enormous line of fools, but who cares? It's not like that with talent. In order to acquire nothing more than the reputation of one's father, it's necessary to be more skilled than he is. You have to have inherited his fibre. I lack the fibre. But my wrist is flexible, the bow moves, and the pot boils. If it's not glory, well, it's food.

ME: In your place, I wouldn't assume it's all said and done with. I'd make an attempt.

HIM: And you think I haven't tried. I wasn't fifteen years old when I first said to myself, "What are you up to, Rameau? You're dreaming. And what are you dreaming about? That you'd like to have done or do something which excites the admiration of the universe. Well, then, you just have to blow on your fingers and wiggle them. Just get started, and you'll be there." At a more advanced age, I repeated what I'd said to myself in my childhood. Today, I'm still repeating it, and I'm standing by the statue of Memnon.

ME: What do you mean talking about the statue of Memnon?

HIM: That's obvious enough, it seems to me. Around the statue of Memnon there were numberless other statues which the sun's rays struck just as

much, but Memnon's statue was the only one which produced a sound. Who's a poet? Well, there's Voltaire. And who else? Voltaire. And a third? Voltaire. And a fourth? Voltaire. And musicians? There's Rinaldo da Capoua, Hasse, Pergolese, Alberti, Tartinin, Locatelli, Terradoglias; there's my uncle, and little Duni who's nothing to look at, no figure, but who feels, my God, who has melody and expression. The others around this small number of Memnons are just so many pairs of ears stuck on the end of sticks. And we're beggars, so poor it's a miracle. Oh, Mister Philosopher, poverty is a terrible thing. I see her crouching there, with her mouth gaping open to receive a few drops of icy cold water dripping from the barrel of the Danaids. I don't know if she sharpens the mind of the philosopher, but she has a devilish way of cooling off the head of a poet. People don't sing well under this barrel. The man who can get himself under it is only too lucky. I was there, and I didn't know how to keep my place. I'd already done that stupid thing once before. I'd been traveling in Bohemia, Germany, Switzerland, Holland, Flanders, all over the damned country.

ME: Under the leaky barrel.

HIM: Under the leaky barrel. The man was a rich Jew who was happy to splash his money around. He liked music and my silly jokes. I played music — just the way that made God happy — and I played the fool. I didn't lack anything. My Jew was a man who understood his law and who observed it strictly in every detail, sometimes with a friend, always with strangers. He got himself in bad trouble which I must tell you about, because it's amusing. In Utrecht there was a charming prostitute. He was attracted to this Christian and sent her a messenger with quite a large letter of credit. The strange creature rejected his offer. The Jew grew desperate. The messenger told him, "Why are you so upset by this? You want to sleep with a good-looking woman. Nothing is easier, even to sleep with one more

beautiful than the one you're chasing. That's my wife. I'll let you have her for the same price." No sooner said than done. The messenger keeps the letter of credit, and my Jew sleeps with the messenger's wife. The due date for the letter of credit arrives. The Jew allows the letter to be challenged and disputes its validity. A trial. The Jew tells himself, "The man will never dare to reveal what right he has to possess my letter, and I'll not have to pay him." At the hearing, he interrogates the messenger, "This letter of credit, who did you get it from?" "From you." "Is it for a loan?" "No." "Is it for the sale of merchandise?" "No." "Is it for services rendered?" "No, but that's not the point. I'm in possession of the letter. You signed it, and you can discharge it." "I didn't sign it." "So then I'm a forger?" "You or someone else who you're acting for." "I'm a coward, but you're a scoundrel. Believe me, don't push me to the limit. I'll tell everything. I'll dishonour myself, but I'll sink you." The Jew paid no attention to the threat, and at the next hearing the messenger revealed the entire affair. They were both reprimanded, and the Jew was condemned to pay off the letter of credit, and the money was applied to the relief of the poor. At that point I left him, and came back here. What was I to do? I had to do something or die of poverty. All sorts of plans went through my head. One day, I was going to leave tomorrow to join up with a troupe traveling through the provinces — I'd be equally good or bad in the theatre or in the orchestra. The next day, I was dreaming of getting someone to paint for me one of those pictures attached to a pole which people set up in a public crossroad, where I'd have shouted my head off, "There's the town where he was born. Here he is leaving his father the apothecary. Here he is arriving in the capital, looking for his uncle's residence. Here he is on his knees before his uncle, who is chasing him away. Here he is with a Jew," and so on and so on. The next day, I'd get up firmly resolved to join up with the street singers. That's not the worst thing I could've done. We could've gone to

give a concert under my dear uncle's windows. He'd have collapsed with rage. But I chose something else.

At that point he stopped and assumed, in succession, the pose of a man who's holding a violin, turning his arms to tighten the strings, and then the pose of a poor devil worn out with exhaustion, with no energy, whose limbs wobbled, ready to die if someone didn't throw him a piece of bread. He showed his extreme need with the gesture of a finger pointing towards his half open mouth. Then he added, "You see what I mean. They'd toss me the loaf, and three or four of us, all famished, would fight over it. So go on, then — think grand thoughts, create beautiful things in an environment of such distress."

ME: That's difficult.

HIM: From one tumble to the next — I fell into that job. I was in clover. Now I've left it. Now I have to scrape the gut once again, and come back to that gesture with my finger pointing towards my gaping mouth. Nothing's very stable in this world. Today at the top of the wheel, tomorrow at the bottom. Damned circumstances lead us along, and lead us really badly.

Then, drinking up what remained at the bottom of the bottle, he spoke to the man next to him: "Sir, would you be so good as to give me a pinch of snuff. That's a lovely box you have there. Are you a musician?" "No." "All the better for you, for they're poor buggers, a pitiful bunch. Destiny wanted me to be a musician, while in a mill in Montmartre there's perhaps a miller or a miller's helper who never listens to anything but the sound of the ratchet but who'd have made up some fine songs. Rameau, go to the mill — the mill that's where you belong."

ME: Whatever a man devotes himself to, nature has destined him for that.

HIM: She makes some strange blunders. In my case, I'm not looking down from that height where everything merges into one — where the man who prunes a tree with cutters and the caterpillar who eats the leaves seem nothing but two different insects, each doing his own work. Go and perch on the epicycle of Mercury and from there, like Reamur who classifies flies into seamstresses, surveyors, and harvesters, you can divide up the human species into woodworkers, carpenters, roofers, dancers, singers — whatever you like. I won't get involved in it. I'm in the world, and I'm staying here. But if it's part of nature to have an appetite — for it's always appetite I come back to, to the feeling which is always present in me — I find that it's not part of a good order if one doesn't always have something to eat. It's a damnable economy with men who cram themselves with everything while others whose stomachs are just as demanding as theirs and have a recurring hunger like theirs have nothing to chew on. The worst thing is the way our need compels us to a certain posture. The man in need doesn't walk like another man — he jumps, he grovels, he wriggles, he crawls. He spends his life taking up and carrying out various positions.

ME: What are these positions?

HIM: Go and ask Noverre. The world offers many more positions than his art can imitate.

ME: So there you are, too, if I can use your expression or rather Montaigne's, perched on the epicycle of Mercury, contemplating the different pantomimes of the human species.

HIM: No, no I'm telling you. I'm too heavy to raise myself so high. Those misty regions I leave to the cranes. I move around from one piece of earth to another. I look around me, and I take up my positions, or I amuse myself

with positions which I have derived from others. I'm an excellent mimic, as you're going to see.

The he begins to smile, to imitate a man admiring, begging, obliging. He sets his right foot forward, his left behind, with his back bent over, his head raised, with his gaze looking directly into another person's eyes, his mouth half open, his arms stretched out towards some object. He waits for his orders. He receives them. He dashes off, comes back. He's done the job and is giving an account of it. He attends to everything. He picks up what falls down. He puts a pillow or a footstool under someone's feet. He holds a saucer. He goes up to a chair. He opens a door. He closes a window. He pulls the curtains. He observes the master and mistress. He is immobile, his arms hanging down, his legs lined up straight. He listens. He seeks to read what's on their faces. And he continues, "That's my pantomime, almost the same as what flatterers, prostitutes, valets, and beggars do."

The antics of this man, the stories of Abbé Galiani, and the extravagances of Rabelais sometimes force me to me profound reflections. They are three stores where I have acquired for myself some ridiculous masks which I put over the faces of the most serious people. I see Pantalon in prelate, a satyr in a judge, a pig in a monk, an ostrich in a minister, and a goose in his first deputy.

ME: But by your count there are lots of beggars in this world, and I don't know anyone who doesn't do some steps in that dance of yours.

HIM: You're right. In the entire kingdom, there's only one man who walks. That's the king. All the rest take up positions.

ME: The king? Isn't there more to it that that? Don't you think that, from time to time, he finds beside him a little foot, a little curl, a little nose which

makes him go through a small pantomime? Whoever needs someone else is a beggar and takes up a position. The king takes up a position before his mistress and before God. He goes through the paces of his pantomime. The minister goes through the paces of prostitute, flatterer, valet, or beggar in front of his king. The crowds of ambitious people dance your positions in hundreds of ways, each more vile than the others, in front of the minister. The noble abbé in his bands of office and his long cloak goes at least once a week in front of the agent in charge of the list of benefices. My goodness, what you call the pantomime of beggars is what makes the earth go round. Everyone has his little Hus and his Bertin.

HIM: That's a great consolation.

But while I was speaking, he was imitating in a killingly funny way the positions of the persons I was naming. For example, for the little abbé, he held his hat under his arm and his breviary in his left hand; in his right hand he lifted up the train of his cloak. He came forward, with his head a little inclined towards his shoulders, his eyes lowered, imitating the hypocrite so perfectly that I believed I was looking at the author of the *Refutations* appearing before the Bishop of Orleans. For the flatterers and for the ambitious he crawled along on his belly — just like Bouret at the Ministry of Finance.

ME: That's done extremely well. But there's one creature who can do without pantomime. That's the philosopher who has nothing and who demands nothing.

HIM: Where's there an animal like that? If he has nothing, he suffers. If he's not asking for anything, he'll get nothing, and he'll be suffering for ever.

ME: No. Diogenes mocked his needs.

HIM: But we have to have clothing.

ME: No. He went about totally naked.

HIM: Sometimes the weather was cold in Athens.

ME: Less so than here.

HIM: People eat there.

ME: No doubt.

HIM: At whose expense?

ME: At nature's. Where does the savage turn? To the earth, to animals, to fish, to trees, to grasses, to roots, to streams.

HIM: A bad menu.

ME: It's a big one.

HIM: But badly served.

ME: Still, it's nature's table that serves to cover our own.

HIM: But you'll admit that the work of our cooks, pastry cooks, sellers of roast meats, caterers, and confectioners adds something of their own to it. With the austere diet of your Diogenes, it wouldn't do to have organs that were easily upset.

ME: But you're wrong. The habits of the cynic were the habits of our monks, with the same virtue. The cynics were the Carmelites and Cordeliers

of Athens.

HIM: I'll take you up on that. Diogenes also danced his pantomime, if not in front of Pericles, at least in front of Lais or Phryne.

ME: You're wrong again. Other people used to pay a prostitute well who gave herself to him for pleasure.

HIM: But what happened if the prostitute was busy and the cynic was in a hurry?

ME: He'd go back to his barrel and manage without her.

HIM: And you're advising me to imitate Diogenes?

ME: I'll bet my life it's better than crawling, demeaning and prostituting oneself.

HIM: But I need a good bed, a fine table, warm clothing in winter, cool clothing in summer, spare time, money, and lots of other things which I prefer to owe to charity than to acquire by work.

ME: That's because you're a good-for-nothing, greedy coward — with a soul of mud.

HIM: I think I've told you that.

ME: Things in life no doubt have a price, but you've no idea of the sacrifice you're making to obtain them. You dance, you have danced, and you'll continue to dance the vile pantomime.

HIM: It's true. But it hasn't cost me much and isn't costing me any more for all that. And that's the reason I'd be making a mistake to take up some other

way of getting along which would bring me grief and which I wouldn't keep up. But I see from what you've told me that my poor little wife was a sort of philosopher. She was as brave as a lion. Sometimes we didn't have any bread or any money. We'd sold just about all our old clothes. I'd throw myself at the foot of our bed and rack my brains to find someone who could lend me an écu which I wouldn't repay. She was as happy as a lark. She'd sit down at her keyboard and accompany herself while singing. She had a voice like a nightingale. I'm sorry you never heard her. When I had some concert to go to, I'd take her with me. On the way I'd say to her, "Come on then, Madame, make them look up to you. Display your talent and your charm. Up with you. Knock them out." We'd arrive. She's sing. She'd rise to the occasion and knock them out. Alas, I lost her, the poor little thing. Apart from her talent, she had a small mouth, big enough to put your finger in, her teeth were a row of pears, her eyes, feet, skin, cheeks, breasts, limbs like a deer, thighs and buttocks all fit for a sculptor's model. Sooner or later, she'd have had the Farmer General. What a walk she had, what a rump! Oh God, what a rump!

And there he was starting to imitate his wife's walk. He took little paces. He held his head high. He played with a fan. He wiggled his backside. It was the most agreeable and ridiculous caricature of our little prostitutes.

Then, picking up the thread of his remarks, he added, "I used to walk with her everywhere — to the Tuileries, to the Palais Royal, on the Boulevards. It was impossible that she'd go on living with me. When she crossed the road in the morning without a hat in a really short skirt you'd have stopped to look at her. And you could've encircled her waist in your fingers without pinching her. The men who followed her, who watched her mincing along on her small feet and measured that large rump whose shape was outlined by her thin petticoats, walked more quickly. She'd let them come up. Then

she'd turn around suddenly confronting them with her two large, black, shining eyes. That stopped them in their tracks. For the front part of the medal was as good as the back. But, alas, I lost her. And my hopes for a fortune have all vanished with her. That's the only reason I married her. I confided all my schemes to her, and she had too much intelligence not to see how right they were and too much judgment not to approve of them."

Then there he was sobbing and crying, as he said, "No, no, I'll never get over it. Ever since, I've taken to wearing bands and a skull cap."

ME: From grief?

HIM: If you like. But the real reason is to have my bowl on my head....But look at the time. I have to go to the opera.

ME: What's playing?

HIM: Something by Dauvergne. There are quite a few fine things in his music. It's a pity that he wasn't the first to write them. There are always a few dead people who upset the living. That's just the way it is. *Quisque suos patimur manes [Each of us has ancestors we must endure]*. It's half past five. I hear the bell sounding for vespers for the Abbé de Canaye and for me. Farewell, Mister Philosopher. Isn't it true that I'm always the same?

ME: Alas, yes — unfortunately.

HIM: Well, I hope this misfortune keeps going for only another forty years. The man who'll laugh last, will laugh best.

THE END

Conversation between D'Alembert and Diderot (1769)

Translated by Jean Stewart and Jonathan Kemp, 1943

Original French Title: 'Entretien entre D'Alembert et Diderot'

d'Alembert: I confess that a Being who exists somewhere and yet corresponds to no point in space, a Being who, lacking extension, yet occupies-space; who is present in his entirety in every part of that space, who is essentially different from matter and yet is one with matter, who follows its motion, and moves it, without himself being in motion, who acts on matter and yet is subject to all its vicissitudes, a Being about whom I can form no idea; a Being of so contradictory a nature, is an hypothesis difficult to accept. But other problems arise if we reject it; for if this faculty upon, which you propose as substitute, is a general and essential quality of matter, then stone must be sensitive.

Diderot: Why not?

d'Alembert: It's hard to believe.

Diderot: Yes, for him who cuts, chisels, and crushes it, and does not hear it cry out.

d'Alembert: I'd like you to tell me what difference there is, according to you, between a man and a statue, between marble and flesh.

Diderot: Not much. Flesh can be made from marble, and marble from flesh.

d'Alembert: But one is not the other.

Diderot: In the same way that what you call animate force is not the same as inanimate force.

d'Alembert: I don't follow you.

Diderot: I'll explain. The transference of a body from one place to another is not itself motion, it is the consequence of motion. Motion exists equally in the body displaced and in the body that remains stationary.

d'Alembert: That's a new way of looking at things.

Diderot: True none the less. Take away the obstacle that prevents the displacement of a stationary body, and it will be transferred. Suddenly rarefy the air that surrounds the trunk of this huge oak, and the water contained in it, suddenly expanding, will burst it into a hundred thousand fragments. I say the same of your own body.

d'Alembert: That may be so. But what relation is there between motion and the faculty of sensation? Do you, by any chance, distinguish between an active and an inactive sensitiveness, as between animate and inanimate force? An animate force which is revealed by displacement, an inanimate force which manifests itself by pressure; an active sensitiveness which would be characterised by a certain recognisable behaviour in the animal and perhaps in the plant, while your inactive sensitiveness only makes itself known when it changes over to the active state?

Diderot: Precisely; just as you say.

d'Alembert: So, then, the statue merely has inactive sensitiveness; and man, animals, perhaps even plants, are endowed with active sensitiveness.

Diderot: There is undoubtedly that difference between the marble block and living tissue; but you can well imagine that's not the only one.

d'Alembert: Of course. Whatever likeness there may be in outward form between a man and a statue, there is no similarity in their internal organisation. The chisel of the cleverest sculptor cannot make even an epidermis. But there is a very simple way of transforming an inanimate force into an animate one the experiment is repeated a hundred times a day before our eyes; whereas I don't quite see how a body can be made to pass from the state of inactive to that of active sensitiveness.

Diderot: Because you don’t want to see it. It is just as common a phenomenon.

d’Alembert: And what is this common phenomenon, if you please?

Diderot: I’ll tell you, since you want to be put to shame; it occurs every time you eat.

d’Alembert: Every time I eat!

Diderot: Yes, for what do you do when you eat? You remove obstacles that prevented the food from possessing active sensitiveness. You assimilate it, you turn it into flesh, you make it animal, you give it the faculty of sensation; and, what you do to this foodstuff, I can do, when I please, to marble.

d’Alembert: And how?

Diderot: How? I shall make it edible.

d’Alembert: Make marble edible? That doesn’t seem easy to me.

Diderot: It’s my business to show you the process. I take the statue you see there, I put it in a mortar, then with great blows from a pestle . . .

d’Alembert: Careful, please; that’s Falconet’s masterpiece ! If it were only by Huez or some one like that....

Diderot: Falconet won’t mind; the statue is paid for, and Falconet cares little for present respect and not at all for that of posterity.

d’Alembert: Go on then, crush it to powder.

Diderot: When the block of marble is reduced to impalpable powder, I mix it with humus or leafmould; I knead them well together; I water the mixture, I let it decompose for a year or two or a hundred, time doesn’t matter to me. When the whole has turned into a more or less homogeneous substance, into humus, do you know what I do?

d’Alembert: I’m sure you don’t eat humus.

Diderot: No; but there is a means of connection, of assimilation, a link, between the humus and myself, a *latus* as the chemist would say.

d’Alembert: Ant that is plant life?

Diderot: Quite right, I sow peas, beans, cabbages, and other vegetables; these plants feed on the soil and I feed on the plants.

d’Alembert: Whether it’s true or false, I like this passage from marble into humus, from humus to the vegetable kingdom, from the vegetable to the animal kingdom, to flesh.

Diderot: So, then, I make flesh, or soul as my daughter said, an actively sensitive substance and if I do not thus solve the problem you set me, at any rate I get pretty near solving it; for you will admit that a piece of marble is much further removed from a being that can feel, than a being that can feel is from a being that can think.

d’Alembert: I agree. But nevertheless the feeling being is not yet the thinking being.

Diderot: Before going one step further let me tell you the history of one of the greatest geometricians in Europe. What was this wonderful creature to begin with? - Nothing.

d’Alembert: What, nothing? Nothing comes from nothing.

Diderot: You take my words too literally. I mean to say that, before his mother, the beautiful and wicked Madame de Tencin, had reached the age of puberty, ant before the adolescence of the soldier La Touche, the molecules which use to form the first rudiments of our geometrician were scattered throughout the frail young bodies of these two, filtering through with the lymph, circulating with the blood, till at last they reached the vessels whence they were destined to unite, the germ cells of his father and mother. The precious germ, then, is formed; now according to the common belief, it is brought through the Fallopian tubes to the womb, it is attached to the womb by a long cord; it grows gradually and develops into a foetus; now comes the moment for it to leave the dark prison; it is born, abandoned on the steps of Saint-Jean-le-Rond, whence it receives its name; now, taken

from the foundlings' home, it is put to the breast of good Madame Rousseau, the glazier's wife; It is given suck, it grows in body and mind, becomes a man of letters, an engineer, a geometrician. How was all this done? Just through eating and other purely mechanical operations. Here, in four words you have the general formula: Eat, digest, *distil in vasi licito*, *et fiat homo secundum artem*. And to expound before the Academy the process of the formation of a man or an animal, one need employ only material agents, the successive results of which would be an inert being, a feeling being, a thinking being, a being solving the problem of the precession of the equinoxes, a sublime being, a marvellous being, a being growing old, fading away, dying, dissolved and given back to the soil.

d'Alembert: You don't believe, then, in pre-existent germs?

Diderot: No.

d'Alembert: Ah, how glad I am of that!

Diderot: Such a theory is against reason and experiment; against experiment, since you would seek in vain for these germs in the egg or in most animals before a certain age; against reason, since, although the mind may conceive of matter as infinitely divisible, it is not so in nature, and it is unreasonable to imagine an elephant wholly formed within an atom, and within that elephant another wholly formed, ant so on to infinity.

d'Alembert: But without these pre-existent germs, how can we account for the original generation of animals?

Diderot: If you're worried by the question "which came first, the hen or the egg", it's because you suppose that animals were originally the same as they are now. What madness! We can no more tell what they were originally than what they will become. The tiny worm, wriggling in the mud, may be in process of developing into a large animal; the huge animal, that terrifies us by its size, is perhaps on the way to becoming a worm, is perhaps a particular and transient production of this planet.

d’Alembert: What’s that you are saying?

Diderot: I was saying to you . . . But it’ll take us away from our original discussion.

d’Alembert: What does that matter? We can get back to it or not, as we please.

Diderot: Will you allow me to skip ahead a few million years in time?

d’Alembert: Why not? Time is nothing for nature.

Diderot: Will you consent to my extinguishing our sun?

d’Alembert: The more readily, since it will not be the first to have gone out.

Diderot: Once the sun has been extinguished what will be the result? Plants will perish, animals will perish, the earth will become desolate and silent. Light up that star once more, and you immediately restore the necessary cause whereby an infinite number of new species will be generated, among which I cannot swear whether, in the course of centuries, the plants and animals we know to-day will or will not be reproduced.

d’Alembert: And why should the same scattered elements coming together again not give the same results?

Diderot: Because everything is connected in nature, and if you imagine a new phenomenon or bring back a moment of the past, you are creating a new world.

d’Alembert: Anyone who thinks deeply cannot deny that. But, to come back to man, since the general order of things required his existence; remember, you left me where the feeling being is about to become the thinking being.

Diderot: I remember.

d’Alembert: Frankly, I’d be very grateful if you would get me over that transition; I’m eager to begin thinking.

Diderot: Even if I should not accomplish it, what effect could that have against a sequence of Incontrovertible facts?

d'Alembert: None, unless we stopped short there.

Diderot: And in order to go further, would it be permissible for us to invent an agent whose attributes should be self-contradictory, a meaningless and unintelligible word?

d'Alembert: No.

Diderot: Can you tell me what constitutes the existence of a perceiving being, for that being itself?

d'Alembert: The consciousness of continued identity from the first moment of reflection to the present.

Diderot: And on what is this consciousness based?

d'Alembert: On the memory of its actions.

Diderot: And without this memory?

d'Alembert: Without this memory it would have no identity, since, realising its existence only at the instant of receiving an impression, it would have no life-story. Its, life would be an interrupted series of sensations with nothing to connect them.

Diderot: Very good. And what is this memory? Whence does it spring?

d'Alembert: From a certain organisation, which develops, grows weaker, and is sometimes lost entirely.

Diderot: Then, if a being that can feel, and that possesses that organisation that gives rise to memory, connects up the impressions it receives, forms through this connection a story which is that of its life, and so acquires consciousness of its identity, it can then deny, affirm, conclude and think.

d'Alembert: So it appears to me, there is only one more difficulty.

Diderot: You are wrong; there are many more

d’Alembert: But one chief one; that is, it seems to me that we can only think of one thing at a time, and that to form even a simple proposition, let alone those vast chains of reasoning that embrace in their course thousands of ideas, one would need to have at least two things present - the object, which seems to remain in the mind’s eye while that mind considers the quality which it is to attribute or to deny to that object.

Diderot: I think that is so; that has made me sometimes compare the fibres of our organs to sensitive vibrating strings which vibrate and resound long after they have been plucked. It is this vibration, this kind of inevitable resonance, which holds the object -present, while the mind is busied about the quality that belongs to that object. But vibrating strings have yet another property, that of making other strings vibrate; and that is how the first idea recalls a second, the two of them a third, these three a fourth and so on, so that there is no limit to the ideas awakened and interconnected in the mind of the philosopher, as he meditates and hearkens to himself amid silence and darkness. This instrument makes surprising leaps, and an idea once aroused may sometimes set vibrating an harmonic at an inconceivable distance. If this phenomenon may be observed between resonant strings that are lifeless and separate, why should it not occur between points that are alive and connected, between fibres that are continuous and sensitive?

d’Alembert: Even if it’s not true, that is at least very ingenious. But I am inclined to think that you are, without realising it, slipping into a difficulty that you wished to avoid.

Diderot: What is that?

d’Alembert: You are opposed to making a distinction between the two substances.

Diderot: I don’t deny it.

d’Alembert: And if you look closer, you’ll see that you are making of the philosopher’s mind a being distinct from the instrument, a musician, as it

were, who listens to the vibrating strings and decides as to their harmony or dissonance.

Diderot: I may have laid myself open to this objection, but you might not have made it if you had considered the difference between the instrument philosopher and the instrument harpsichord. The philosopher is an instrument that has the faculty of sensation; he is, at the same time, both the musician and the instrument. As he can feel, he is immediately conscious of the sound he gives forth; as he is an animal, he retains the memory of it. This faculty of the organism, connecting up the sounds within him, produces and preserves the melody there. Just suppose that your harpsichord has the power to feel and to remember, and tell me if it will not know and repeat of its own accord the airs that you have played on its keys. We are instruments endowed with feeling and memory; our senses are so many keys that are struck by surrounding nature, and that often strike themselves. This is all, in my opinion, that happens in a harpsichord which is organised like you or me. An impression is created by some cause either within or outside the instrument, a sensation is aroused by this impression, a sensation that persists, since you cannot imagine it arising and dying instantaneously; another impression follows, which equally has its cause either within or outside the animal, a second sensation, and voices to indicate them by natural or conventional sounds.

d'Alembert: I understand. So then, if this harpsichord were not only sensitive and animate but were further endowed with the faculty of feeding and reproducing itself, it would live and breed of itself, or with its female, little harpsichords, also living and vibrating.

Diderot: Undoubtedly. In your opinion, what, other than this, is a chaffinch, a nightingale, a musician or a man? And what other difference do you find between a bird and a bird-organ? Do you see this egg? With this you can overthrow all the schools of theology, all the churches of the earth.

What is this egg? An unperceiving mass, before the germ is introduced into it; and after the germ is introduced, what is it then? still only an unperceiving mass, for this germ itself is only a crude inert fluid. How will this mass develop into a different organisation, to sensitiveness, to life? By means of heat. And what will produce the heat? Motion. What will be the successive effects of this motion? Instead of answering me, sit down and let's watch them from moment to moment. First there's a dot that quivers, a little thread that grows longer and takes on colour; tissue is formed; a beak, tiny wings, eyes, feet appear; a yellowish material unwinds and produces intestines; it is an animal. This animal moves, struggles, cries out; I hear its cries through the shell; it becomes covered with down; it sees. The weight of its head, shaking about, brings its beak constantly up against the inner wall of its prison; now the wall is broken; it comes out, it walks about, flies, grows angry, runs away,-comes near again, complains, suffers, loves, desires, enjoys; it has the same affections as yourself, it performs the same actions. Are you going to assert with Descartes that it is a purely imitative machine? Little children will laugh at you, and philosophers will retort that if this be a machine then you, too, are a machine. If you admit that between the animal and yourself the difference is merely one of organisation, you will be showing good sense and reason, you will be honest; but from this there will be drawn the conclusion that refutes you; namely that, from inert matter, organised in a certain way, and impregnated with other inert matter, and given heat and motion, there results the faculty of sensation, life, memory, consciousness, passion and thought. You have only two courses left to take: either to imagine within the inert mass of the egg a hidden element that awaited the egg's development before revealing its presence, or to assume that this invisible element crept in through the shell at a definite moment in the development. But what is this element? Did it occupy space or did it not? How did it come, or did it escape without

moving? What was it doing there or elsewhere? Was it created at the instant it was needed? Was it already in existence? Was it waiting for a home? If it was homogeneous it was material; if heterogeneous, one cannot account for its -previous inertia nor its activity in the developed animal. Just listen to yourself, and you will be sorry for yourself; if you will perceive that, in order to avoid making a simple supposition that explains everything, namely the faculty of sensation as a general property of matter or a product of its organisation, you are giving up common sense and plunging headlong into an abyss of mysteries, contradictions and absurdities.

d'Alembert: A supposition! It pleases you to say so. But suppose this quality is in its essence incompatible with matter?

Diderot: And how do you know that the faculty of sensation is essentially incompatible with matter, you who do not know the essence of anything, either of matter or of sensation? Do you understand the nature of motion any better, how it comes to exist in a body, and its transmission from one to another?

d'Alembert: Without understanding the nature of sensation or that of matter, I can see that the faculty of sensation is a simple quality, entire, indivisible, and incompatible with a subject or substratum which is divisible.

Diderot: Metaphysico-theological nonsense! What! don't you see that all the qualities, all the forms by which nature becomes perceptible to our senses, are essentially indivisible? You cannot have more or less impenetrability. There is half a round body, but there is not a half of roundness: you can have motion to a greater or less degree, but either there is motion or there is not. You cannot have half, or a third, or a quarter of a head, an ear, a finger, any more than half, a third, or a quarter of a thought. If in the universe no one particle is like another, in a particle no one point like another, acknowledge that the atom itself possesses an indivisible

quality or form; acknowledge that division is incompatible with the essence of forms, since it destroys them. Be a physicist, and acknowledge the produced character of an effect when you see it produced, even if you cannot explain all the steps that led from the cause to the effect. Be logical, and do not substitute for a cause which exists and which explains everything, another cause which cannot be comprehended, whose connection with the effect is even more difficult to grasp, which engenders an infinite number of difficulties and solves not one of them.

d'Alembert: But what if I give up this cause?

Diderot: There is only one substance in the universe, in man and in the animal. The bird-organ is made of wood, man of flesh. The bird is of flesh, the musician of flesh differently organised; but both of them have the same origin, the same formation, the same functions and the same end.

d'Alembert: And how is the convention of sounds established between your two harpsichords >

Diderot: Since an animal is a perceiving instrument, resembling any other in all respects, having the same structure, being strung with the same chords, stimulated in the same way by joy, pain, hunger, thirst, colic, wonder, terror, it is impossible that at the Pole and at the Equator it should utter different sounds. And so you will find that interjections are about the same in all languages, living and dead. The origin of conventional sounds must be ascribed to need and to proximity. The instrument endowed with the faculty of sensation, or the animal, has discovered by experience that when it uttered a certain sound a certain result followed outside it, feeling instruments like itself or other animals drew nearer, went away, asked or offered things, hurt or caressed it. All these consequences became connected in its memory and in that of others with the utterance of these sounds; and note that human intercourse consists only of sounds and actions. And, to appreciate the power of my system, notice further that it is

subject to the same insurmountable difficulty that Berkeley brought against the existence of bodies. There came a moment of madness when the feeling harpsichord thought that it was the only harpsichord in the world, and that the whole harmony of the universe resided in it.

d'Alembert: There's a lot to be said on all that.

Diderot: True.

d'Alembert: For instance, your system doesn't make it clear how we form syllogisms or draw inferences.

Diderot: We don't draw them; they are all drawn by nature. We only state the existence of connected phenomena, which are known to us practically, by experience, whose existence may be either necessary or contingent; necessary in the case of mathematics, physics, and other exact sciences; contingent in ethics, politics and other conjectural sciences.

d'Alembert: Is the connection between phenomena less necessary in one case than in another?

Diderot: No, but the cause undergoes too many particular vicissitudes which escape our observation, for us to be able to count with certainty upon the result that will ensue. Our certainty that a violent-tempered man will grow angry at an insult is not the same as our certainty that one body striking a smaller body will set it in motion.

d'Alembert: What about analogy?

Diderot: Analogy, in the most complex cases, is only a rule of three working out in the feeling instrument. If a familiar natural phenomenon is followed by another familiar natural phenomenon, what will be the fourth phenomenon that will follow a third, either provided by nature or imagined in imitation of nature? If the lance of an ordinary warrior is ten feet long, how long will the lance of Ajax be? If I can throw a stone weighing four pounds, Diomedes must be able to shift a large block of rock. The strides of gods and the leaps of their horses will correspond n to the imagined

proportion between gods and men. You have here a fourth chord in harmony with and proportional to three others; and the animal awaits its resonance, which always occurs within itself, though not always in nature. The poet doesn't mind about that, it doesn't affect his kind of truth. But it is otherwise with the philosopher; he must proceed to examine nature which often shows him a phenomenon quite different from what he had supposed, and then he perceives that he had been seduced by an analogy.

d'Alembert: Farewell, my friend, good evening and good night to you.

Diderot: You're joking: but you will dream on your pillow about this conversation, and if it doesn't take on substance there, so much the worse for you; for you will be obliged to adopt far more absurd hypotheses.

d'Alembert: You're wrong there; I shall go to bed a sceptic, and a sceptic I shall arise.

Diderot: Sceptic! Is there such a thing as a sceptic?

d'Alembert: That's a good one! Are you going to tell me, now, that I'm no sceptic? Who should know about that better than I?

Diderot: Wait a moment.

d'Alembert: Hurry up, for I'm anxious to get to sleep.

Diderot: I'll be brief. Do you believe there is a single debated question, on which a man can halt with a strictly equal measure of reason *for* and *against*?

d'Alembert: No, that would be like Buridan's ass.

Diderot: In that case, there's no such being as the sceptic, since, apart from mathematical questions which admit of no uncertainty, there is for and against in all questions. The scales, then, are never even, and it is impossible that they should not hang more heavily on the side that seems to us to have most probability.

d'Alembert: But probability appears to me on the right hand in the morning, on the left in the afternoon.

Diderot: That is to say, you are dogmatic for in the morning and dogmatic against in the afternoon.

d'Alembert: And in the evening, when I recall this rapid change in my judgments, I believe neither the morning's nor the afternoon's.

Diderot: That is to say, you don't remember which preponderated of the two opinions between which you wavered; that this preponderance appears to you too slight to settle your feelings definitely, and that you decide to cease worrying over such problematic subjects, to leave the discussion of them to others and to contest them no further.

d'Alembert: That may be so.

Diderot: But if someone drew you aside, and asked you in a friendly way to tell him honestly, which of the two alternatives seemed to you to present fewer difficulties, would you really be at a loss to answer, and would you realize Buridan's ass in your own person?

d'Alembert: I think not.

Diderot: Come, my friend, if you think over it well, you will find that, in everything, our true feeling is not that about which we have never vacillated, but that to which we have most constantly returned.

d'Alembert: I believe you're right.

Diderot: And so do I. Good night, my friend, and remember that " dust thou art, to dust thou shalt return."

d'Alembert: That is sad.

Diderot: And yet necessary. Grant man, I don't say immortality, but merely a double span of life, and you'll see what will happen.

d'Alembert: And what do you expect to happen? . . . But what do I care? Let happen what may. I want to sleep, so good night to you.

Regrets for my Old Dressing Gown (1769)



OR, A WARNING TO THOSE WHO HAVE MORE TASTE THAN FORTUNE

Translated by Mitchell Abidor, 2005

Original French Title: 'Regrets sur ma vieille robe de chambre'

WHY didn't I keep it? It was used to me and I was used to it. It molded all the folds of my body without inhibiting it; I was picturesque and handsome. The other one is stiff, and starchy, makes me look stodgy. There was no need to which its kindness didn't loan itself, for indigence is almost always officious. If a book was covered in dust, one of its panels was there to wipe it off. If thickened ink refused to flow in my quill, it presented its flank. Traced in long black lines, one could see the services it had rendered me. These long lines announce the *litterateur*, the writer, the man who works. I now have the air of a rich good for nothing. No one knows who I am.

In its shelter I feared neither the clumsiness of a valet, nor my own, neither the explosion of fire nor the spilling of water. I was the absolute master of my old robe. I have become the slave of the new one.

The dragon that guarded the golden fleece was no more worried than I am. Care envelopes me.

The infatuated old man who turns himself over to the whims , to the mercies of a young girl says, from morning to night; where is my good, my old housekeeper? What demon obsessed me the day I chased her away for this one! And then he cries, he sighs.

I don't cry, I don't sigh, but every moment I say: Cursed be he who invented the art of putting a price on common material by tinting it scarlet.

Cursed be the precious garment that I revere. Where is my old, my humble, my comfortable rag of common cloth?

My friends, keep your old friends. My friends, fear the touch of wealth. Let my example teach you a lesson. Poverty has its freedoms; opulence has its obstacles.

O Diogenes! How you would laugh if you saw your disciple beneath Aristipius' luxurious mantle! O Aristipius, this luxurious mantle was paid for by many low acts. What a difference between your soft, crawling, effeminate life and the free and firm life of the rag-wearing cynic. I left behind the barrel in which I ruled in order to serve a tyrant.

But that's not all, my friend. Lend an ear to the ravages of luxury, the results of a consistent luxury.

My old robe was one with the other rags that surrounded me. A straw chair, a wooden table, a rug from Bergamo, a wood plank that held up a few books, a few smoky prints without frames, hung by its corners on that tapestry. Between these prints three or four suspended plasters formed, along with my old robe, the most harmonious indigence.

All is now discordant. No more coordination, no more unity, no more beauty.

A new, sterile housekeeper who succeeds to a presbytery, the wife who enters the house of a widower, the minister who replaces a disgraced minister, the Molinist prelate who takes over the diocese of a Jansenist prelate cause no more trouble than the scarlet intruder has caused in my household.

I can bear the sight of a peasant woman without disgust. That piece of simple cloth that covers her head, the hair that sparsely falls across her cheeks, those tattered rags that half cover her, that poor short petticoat that doesn't cover half her legs, her naked feet covered with muck cannot wound me. It is the image of a state I respect; its the ensemble of the of the lack of

grace of a necessary and unfortunate condition for which I have pity. But my stomach turns and, despite the perfumed atmosphere that follows her, I distance myself, I turn my gaze away from that courtisan whose coiffure *a points d'angleterre,* torn sleeves, filthy silk stockings and worn shoes show me the poverty of the day combined with the opulence of the previous evening.

Such would have been my domicile, if the imperious scarlet hadn't set everything to march in unison with it.

I saw the Bergamo cede the wall to which it had so long been attached to the damascene hanging.

Two prints not without merit: The *Chute de la Manne dans le Desert* by Poussin and *Esther devant Assuerus* of the same painter; the one shamefully chased away by an old man by Rubens was the sad Esther; The falling manna was dissipated by a Tempest by Vernet.

The straw chair was relegated to the antechamber by a leather chair.

Homer, Virgil, Horace,and Cicero relieved the weak fir bending under their mass and have been closed in in an inlaid armoire, an asylum more worthy of them than of me.

A large mirror took over the mantle of my fireplace.

Those two lovely molds that I owed to Falconet's friendship, and which he repaired himself, were moved away by a crouching Venus. Modern clay broken by antique bronze.

The wooden table was still fighting in the field, sheltered by a mass of pamphlets and papers piled up any which way, and which it appeared would protect it from the injuries that threatened it. One day it met its destiny, and despite my laziness the pamphlets and papers put themselves away in a precious bureau.

Evil instinct of the convenient! Delicate and ruinous tact, sublime taste that changes, moves, builds and overturns; that empties the coffers of the

fathers; that leaves daughters without a dowry, the sons without an education; that makes so many beautiful things and great evils. You who substituted in my house the fatal and precious desk for the wooden table: it is you who ruins nations, it is you who will perhaps one day take my effects to the Pont Saint-Michel where will be heard the hoarse voice of a certified auctioneer saying: Twenty *louis* for a crouching Venus.

The space that remained between the tablet of this desk and the Tempest by Vernet, which is above it, made for a void disagreeable to the eye. This void was filled by a clock. And what a clock! A clock *a la geoffrin*; a clock whose the gold contrasts with the bronze.

There was a vacant corner next to my window. This corner asked for a writing desk, which it obtained.

Another unpleasant void between the tablet of the writing desk and the lovely head by Rubens was filled by two La Grenées.

Here is a Magdeleine by the same artist; there is a sketch either by Vien or Machy, for I also went in for sketches. And it was thus that the edifying repair of a philosopher transformed itself into the scandalous cabinet of a publican. In addition, I insult national poverty.

All that remains of my original mediocrity is a rug of selvage. I can feel that this pitiful rug doesn’t go well with my newfound luxury. But I swore and I swear, like the peasant transferred from his hut to a palace who keeps his sabots, that Denis the philosopher will never walk upon a masterpiece of la Savonnier. When in the morning, covered in my sumptuous scarlet, I enter my office I lower my gaze and I see my old rug of selvage. It reminds me of my beginnings and pride is stopped at the entryway to my heart.

No my friend, no, I have not been corrupted. My door is always open to the needy who address themselves to me; they find me as affable as ever. I listen to them, I give them advice, I assist them, I feel for them. My soul has not been hardened, my head has not gotten too big. My back is good and

round, just as before. There's the same honesty, the same sensitivity. My luxury is brand new and the poison has not yet acted. But who knows what will happen with time? What can be expected of he who has forgotten his wife and his daughter, who has run up debts, who has ceased to be a spouse and father and who, instead of depositing a useful sum deep in a faithful coffer...

Oh holy prophet! Raise you hands to the heavens and pray for a friend in peril. Say to God: If you see in your eternal decrees that riches are corrupting the heart of Denis, don't spare the masterpieces he idolizes. Destroy them and return him to his original poverty. And I, on my side, will say to the heavens: Oh God! I resign myself to the prayer of the holy prophet and to your will. I abandon everything to you. Take back everything, everything except the Vernet! It's not the artist, it is you who made it. Respect your own work and that of friendship.

See that lighthouse, see the adjacent tower that rises to the right. See the old tree that the winds have torn. How beautiful that masse is. Above that obscure masse, see the rocks covered in verdure. It is thus that your powerful hand formed them. It is thus that your beneficent hand has carpeted them. See that uneven terrace that descends from the foot of the rocks to the sea. It is the very image of the degradation you have permitted time to exercise on those things of the world that are the most solid. Would your sun have lighted it otherwise? God, if you annihilate that work of art it will be said that you are a jealous God. Have pity on the unfortunates spread out on these banks. Is it not enough for you to have shown them the depths of the abyss? Did you save them only to destroy them? Listen to the prayer of this man who thanks you. Aid in the efforts of he who gathers together the sad remains of his fortune. Close your ear to the imprecations of this madman. Alas, he promised himself such advantageous returns, he had contemplated rest and retirement. He was on his last voyage. A hundred

times along the way he calculated on his fingers the size of his fortune and had arranged for its use. And now all of his hopes have vanished; he has barely enough to cover his naked limbs. Be touched by the tenderness of these two spouses. Look at the terror that you have inspired in that woman. She offers you thanks for the evil you did not do her. Nevertheless, her child, too young to know to what peril you exposed it, he, his father and his mother, takes care of the faithful companion of his voyage: he is attaching the collar of his dog. Spare the innocent. Look at that mother freshly escaped from the waters with her spouse: it is not for herself that she is trembling, it is for her child. See how she squeezes it to her breast, how she kisses it. O God, recognize the waters you have created. Recognize them, both when your breath moves them and when your hand calms them. Recognize the black clouds that you gathered and that it pleased you to scatter. Already they are separating, they are moving away; already the light of the day star is reborn on the face of the waters. I foresee calm on that red horizon. How far it is, the horizon! It doesn't end with the sea. The sky descends beneath it and seems to turn around the globe. Finish lighting up the sky; finish rendering tranquility to the sea. Allow those seamen to put their shipwrecked boat back to sea. Assist in their labor, give them strength and leave me this painting. leave it to me, like the rod with which you will punish the vain. It is already the case that it is no longer i that people visit, that people come to listen to: it is Vernet they come to admire in my house. The painter has humiliated the philosopher.

Oh my friend, the beautiful Vernet I own! The subject is the end of a storm without a harmful catastrophe. The seas are still agitated, the sky covered in clouds; the sailors are busy on their sunken boat, the inhabitants come running from the nearby mountains. How much spirit this painter has! He needed but a small number of principal figures to render all the circumstances of the moment he chose. How true this scene is! With what

lightness, ease and vigor it is all painted. I want to keep this testimony of his friendship. I want my son-in-law to transmit it to his children, his children to theirs, and these latter to those that will be born of them.

If only you saw the beauty of the whole of this piece, how everything there is harmonious, how the effects work together, how everything is brought out without effort or affectation. How those mountains on the right are wrapped in vapor. How beautiful those rocks and superimposed edifices are. How picturesque that tree is and the lighting on that terrace. How the light there fades away, how its figures are laid out: true, active, natural, living. How interesting they are, the force with which they are painted. The purity with which they are drawn, how they stand out from the background. The enormous breadth of that space, the verisimilitude of those waters. Those clouds, the sky, that horizon! Here the background is deprived of light, while the foreground is lit up, unlike the usual technique. Come see my Vernet, but don't take it from me!

With time all debts will be paid, remorse will be calmed and I will have pure joy. Don't fear that the mad desire to stock up beautiful things has taken control of me. The friends I had I sill have, and their number hasn't grown. I have Lais but Lais doesn't have me. Happy in her arms, I am ready to cede her to she who I'll love and who she'll make happier than me. And I want to tell you a secret: that Lais, who it cost others so much to buy, cost me nothing.

Thoughts on Religion (1770)

ADDITION TO THE “PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHTS”

Translated by Mitchell Abidor, 2005

Original French Title: ‘Addition aux Pensées philosophiques’

I

In religion, doubts, far from being acts of impiety, should be looked upon as good works when they issue from a man who humbly recognizes his ignorance, and when they are born of the fear of displeasing God by the abuse of reason

II

Admitting to a degree of conformity between man’s reason and eternal reason – which is God – and then claiming that God demands the sacrifice of human reason, is to establish that he wants and doesn’t want at the same time.

III

When God, from whom we receive reason, demands its sacrifice it is like a prestidigitator who takes back what he has given.

IV

If I renounce reason I no longer have a guide. I have to blindly accept a secondary principle and suppose that which is in question.

V

If reason is a gift from heaven, and the same thing can be said of faith, then heaven has given us two incompatible and contradictory presents.

VI

In order to remove this difficulty one must say that faith is a chimerical principle that doesn't exist in nature.

VII

Pascal, Nicole, and others have said: "That God should punish innocent children with eternal punishment for the guilty deeds of a father is a superior proposition and is not contrary to reason." But what then is a proposition contrary to reason if that which obviously expresses a blasphemy isn't one?

VIII

Lost in an immense forest during the night I only have a small light to guide me. An unknown man appears and says to me: "My friend, blow out your candle so you can better find your way." This unknown man is a theologian.

IX

If my reason comes from on high then it is the voice of heaven that speaks through it. I must listen to it.

X

Merit and lack of merit cannot be applied to the use of reason, because all the good will in the world cannot make a blind man discern colors. Unless

I’m an imbecile I am forced to see evidence where it is, and the lack of evidence where it isn’t. And imbecility is a misfortune and not a vice.

XI

The author of nature, who will not reward me for having been intelligent will not damn me for having been a fool.

XII

And he will not damn you for having been evil. After all, weren’t you unhappy enough because you were evil?

XIII

Every virtuous act is accompanied by internal satisfaction, every criminal act by remorse. Yet without shame or remorse the spirit confesses its repugnance for this or that proposition. There is thus neither virtue nor crime in either believing or rejecting it.

XIV

If grace is necessary in order to do good, then of what use was Jesus Christ’s death?

XV

If there are a hundred thousand damned beings for every one who is saved, then the devil always has the advantage, without having abandoned his son to death.

XVI

The Christian God is a father who makes much of his apples and very little of his children.

XVII

Take the fear of hell from a Christian and you take from him his belief.

XVIII

A true religion, interesting all men in all times and places, must be eternal, universal, and evident. None have these three characteristics. All are thus demonstrated false three times over.

XIX

Those facts that only a few men are able to witness are insufficient to demonstrate a religion that should be equally believed by everyone.

XX

The facts upon which religions are based are ancient and marvelous, that is to say, as suspect as is possible in proving that which is the most incredible.

XXI

Proving the Gospels by a miracle means proving an absurdity by something counter to nature.

XXII

But what will God do to those who didn’t hear His son speak? Will He punish the deaf for not having heard?

XXIII

What will He do to those who, having heard tell of His religion were not able to understand it? Will he punish pygmies for not having been able to take giant steps?

XXIV

Why are the miracles of Jesus Christ true, while those of Aesculapius, Apollonius of Tyane, and Mohammed are false?

XXV

So all the Jews who were in Jerusalem were apparently converted upon seeing Jesus Christ's miracles? Not in the least. Far from believing in him they crucified him. We must agree that these Jews are men like no others. We have everywhere seen people led along by one sole false miracle, but Jesus Christ could do nothing with the Jewish people with an infinite number of true miracles.

XXVI

It is this miracle of Jewish incredulity that something should be made of, and not that of the resurrection.

XXVII

It is as certain as two and two make four that Caesar existed. It is as certain that Jesus Christ existed as that Caesar did. It is thus as certain that Jesus Christ was resurrected as that he or Caesar existed. What logic! The existence of Jesus Christ and Caesar is not a miracle.

XXVIII

We read in “The Life of M. Turenne” that a fire having broken out in a house the presence of the holy sacrament suddenly stopped the flames. But we also read in history that a monk having poisoned a consecrated host, a German Emperor had no sooner swallowed it than he died.

XXIX

There could be found in this something other than the appearance of bread and wine, or we would have to say that poison had been incorporated into the blood and body of Jesus Christ.

XXX

This body rots, this blood turns. This God is devoured by termites on the altar. Blind people, imbecilic Egyptian, open your eyes!

XXXI

The religion of Jesus Christ, announced by the ignorant, made the first Christians. The same religion, preached by savants and doctors, only makes unbelievers today.

XXXII

It is objected that submission to a legislative authority dispenses one from reasoning. But where on the face of the earth is there a religion without such authority?

XXXIII

It is childhood education that prevents a Mohammedan from having himself baptized. It is childhood education that prevents a Christian from being circumcised. It is the reason of the mature man that holds in equal contempt both baptism and circumcision.

XXXIV

It is said in St. Luke that God the Father is greater than God the Son, *pater major me est.* Nevertheless, despite so clear a passage, the church pronounces anathema against the scrupulous believer who holds literally to the words of his father's testament**.**

XXXV

Since there is no passage in the scriptures that is more precise than this one, if the word of authority is able to dispose of the meaning of this passage as it wishes, then there are none we can say we fully understood and with which the church can't do what it pleases in the future.

XXXVI

Tu es petrus, et super hunc petrum aedificabo ecclesiam mean. Is this the language of a God or a confused assemblage worthy of the *Seigneur des accords?* [From Estienne Tabourot's "Les Bigarrures et Touches du Sirgneur des Accords avec les apothegms du sieur Gaulard," ()]

XXXVII

In dolore paries (Genesis). You will give birth in pain, said God to the sinning woman. And what did female animals do to him that they too should give birth in pain?

XXXVIII

If *pater major me est* is to be understood literally Jesus Christ isn't God. If *hoc est corpus meum* is to be understood literally he gave himself to his apostles with his own hands, which is as absurd as saying St Denis kissed his own head after it was cut off.

XXXIX

It is said that he withdrew to the Mount of Olives and prayed. And who did he pray to? He prayed to himself**.**

XL

"This God, who makes God die in order to appease God" is an excellent quote from Baron de la Hontan. [Gascon gentleman and traveler of the 17th Century] There is less evidence for and against Christianity in a hundred in-folio volumes than there is of the ridiculous in these two lines.

XLI

To say that man is a composite of force and weakness, of enlightenment and blindness, or small-mindedness and grandeur does not mean not putting him on trial, it rather defines him.

XLII

Either man is like God or nature made him, and God and nature do nothing that is evil.

XLIII

What we call "original sin" Ninon de l'Enclos called "an original sin."

XLIV

It is an unexampled impudence to cite the conformity of the writers of the Gospels when there are important facts in some of them that are not even mentioned in others.

XLV

Plato considered the Divinity under three aspects: goodness, wisdom, and power. You have to be blind not to see in this the trinity of the Christians. Almost three thousand years ago the philosopher of Athens called “logos” what we call the word.

XLVI

The divine persons are either three accidents or three substances. There is no middle way. If they are three accidents we are either atheists or deists. If they are three substances we are pagans.

XLVII

God the Father judges men to be deserving of His eternal vengeance. God the Son judges them deserving of His infinite pity. The Holy Ghost remains neutral. How can we make this Catholic verbiage agree with the unity of the divine will?

XLVIII

A long time ago it was asked of theologians that they find a way to reconcile eternal punishment with God’s infinite mercy. They haven’t advanced a step.

XLIX

And why punish a guilty man if there is no good to be obtained from his punishment?

L

If we punish for ourselves alone we are both cruel and evil**.**

LI

No good father would want to resemble the heavenly Father.

LII

What proportionality is there between the offender and the offended? What proportionality between the offense and the punishment? A heap of foolishness and atrocities**.**

LIII

And what causes Him to be so full of wrath, this God? And couldn't it be said that I am able do something for or against His glory, for or against His repose, for or against His happiness?

LIV

They want God to burn those who are wicked – who can do nothing against him – in a fire that will continue without end, and yet they do not permit a father to deal a passing death to a son who compromised his life, his honor, and his fortune.

LV

Oh Christians, you have two different ideas of good and evil, of truth and falsehood. You are thus either the most absurd of dogmatists or the most extreme of skeptics.

LVI

All the evil of which we are capable is not all the evil that is possible, yet it is only he who can commit all the evil possible who also deserves eternal punishment. In order to make God into an infinitely vindictive being you transform an earthworm into an infinitely powerful being.

LVII

Upon hearing a theologian exaggerate the act of a man who God was bawdy and slept with his neighbor – who God made obliging and beautiful; couldn't we say that the four corners of the world have been set on fire? My friend, listen to Marcus Aurelius and you will see that you anger your God for nothing but the illicit and voluptuous rubbing together of two intestines.

LVIII

What these atrocious Christians translated as "eternal" only means "lasting" in Hebrew. The dogma of eternal punishment comes from the ignorance of a Hebraist and the ferocious humor of an interpreter.

LXIX

That Jesus Christ, who is God, was tempted by the devil is a tale worthy of "The Thousand and One Nights."

LXI

I would like a Christian, and especially a Jansenist, to make me understand the *cui bono* of the incarnation. And the number of the damned should not be infinitely inflated if we want to obtain some advantage from this dogma.

LXII

A young girl lived withdrawn from the world. One day she received the visit of a young man who was carrying a bird. She became pregnant and was asked who made the child. What a question! It was the bird.

LXIII

Why do Leida's swan and the tiny flames of Castor and Pollux make us laugh yet we don't laugh at the dove and the tongues of fire of the Gospels?

LXIV

In the first centuries there were sixty gospels that were almost equally believed. Fifty-six were rejected for puerility or ineptitude. Is there anything but this in those that were kept?

LXV

God gives a first law to man and then he abolishes that law. Is this not the conduct of a legislator who has made a mistake and who recognizes it as time passes? Would a perfect being change its mind?

LXVI

There are as many kinds of faith as there are religions in the world.

LXVII

All the sectarians in the world are nothing but heretical deists.

LXVIII

If man is unhappy without having been born guilty, might it not be that he is destined to enjoy eternal happiness without being able, by his very nature, to ever make himself worthy of it?

LXIX

This is what I think of Christian dogma. I will only say one word on its morality: It is that a Catholic who is father of a family, convinced that the maxims of the Gospels must be practiced under penalty of what is called hell, and given the extreme difficulty in reaching this degree of perfection, which human weakness prevents, I see nothing else to be done than for him to take his child by the foot and smash him against the ground, or to suffocate it at birth. By this act he saves it from the peril of damnation and assures him eternal happiness. And I maintain that this act, far from being criminal, should be considered infinitely praiseworthy, since it is founded upon paternal love, which demands that all good fathers do all the good possible for their children.

LXX

Are not the precepts of religion and society's laws, which prohibit the murder of innocents, in fact quite absurd and cruel, since in killing them we assure them infinite happiness and in letting them live we almost certainly destine them to eternal unhappiness?

LXXI

What is that, Monsieur de la Condamine? It would be permitted to inoculate your son to protect him from smallpox, but it isn't permitted to kill him to protect him from hell? Surely you jest.

LXXII

Satis triumphat veritas si apud paucos. Eosque bonos, accepta sit; nec ejus indoles placere multis.

The following two thoughts were taken from manuscripts of Diderot's at the Hermitage in St Petersburg. They deal with the same subject matter as the above, and the second has noted at its head "Philosophical thought."

Formerly, on the island of Ternate no one, not even priests, was allowed to speak of religion. There was only one temple, and a law expressly forbade that there be a second one. There could be found there neither altars nor statues, nor images. A hundred priests, who enjoyed considerable revenue, worked in the temple. They neither sang nor spoke, but in an enormous silence pointed at a pyramid upon which was written these words: "Mortals, adore God, love your brothers and make yourselves useful to the nation."

* * *

A man had been betrayed by his children, his wife, and his friends. Faithless friends had reversed his fortunes and plunged him into poverty. Penetrated by hatred and profound contempt for humanity he left society and took refuge alone in a cave. There, with his head in his hands, and meditating a vengeance proportional to his resentment, he said: "Those evil ones. What shall I do to punish them for their injustice and make them all as unhappy as they deserve to be? If only it were possible to imagine this...to attach them to a chimera upon which they'd place more importance than their lives and about which they could never be in agreement!..." And then

he ran from the cave, crying out: “God! God!...” Echoes without number repeated around him: “God! God!...” This fearsome name was carried from one pole to the other, and heard everywhere with amazement. At first men prostrated themselves, then they stood up, questioned, disputed, became bitter, anathematized, hated, killed each other. The fatal wish of the misanthrope was fulfilled. For such was in the past, and such shall be in the future the history of a being that is forever equally important and incomprehensible.

A Father Talks with his Children (1771)

OR, THE DANGER OF SETTING ONE'S OWN JUDGMENT ABOVE THE LAW.

Translated by Beatrix L. Tollemache, 1904

Original French Title: 'Entretien d'un père avec ses enfants'

MY father was a man of great common-sense and judgment, but pious withal, and was much renowned in the district for his strict honesty. More than once he had been chosen to arbitrate between his fellow citizens, and even strangers who did not know him personally confided in him to carry out their last wishes. When he died the poor wept his loss; and during his last illness both rich and poor showed their sympathy and grieved when he was heard to be dying. I shall always preserve his portrait in my memory; I fancy I see him sitting in his large arm-chair, with his serene countenance and quiet manner, and his voice still lingers in my ears. I will give an account of one of our evenings together; it is a sample of many similar hours spent thus in familiar converse.

It was winter and we were sitting round him near the fire, the Abbé, my sister, and myself. After speaking of the inconveniences attending celebrity, he said, "My son, you and I have both made a noise in the world, but there was this difference, the noise you made with your tool deprived you of rest, but that which I made with mine deprived others of their rest." When the old cutler had made this little joke he fell into a reverie and gazed at us with a strange fixity of attention, till the Abbé asked him —

"Father what are you thinking of?"

“I was thinking,” he answered, “that the reputation of being an honest man, though the most to be desired of all, has its dangers, even to a man who deserves it.” Then, after a short pause, he added, “I shudder as I think of it. Would you believe it, my children, that once in my life I was nearly ruining you — yes, ruining you outright?” The Abbé— “And how was that?”

My Father— “How, well, — but before I begin,” and he turned to his daughter, “my child, just raise my pillow a little, it has slipped down.” Then he said to me, “Son, wrap my dressing gown round my legs, for the fire is scorching them. You have all heard of the curé of Thivet?”

My Sister— “That good old priest who used to walk four leagues in a morning when he was a hundred years old?”

The Abbé— “And who died at the age of a hundred and one on hearing of the death of his brother, aged ninety-six, who lived with him?”

My Father— “That very man.”

The Abbé— “Well?”

My Father— “Well, his next-of-kin were poor folk, scattered here and there in the country and on the highways, some even begging their bread at church doors; they sent me a power of attorney, and asked me to go to the place and look after the property and affairs of their kinsman, the late curé. I went to Thivet, for how could I refuse to these poor folk the kindly services that I had often given to my richer neighbours? I sent for the magistrate of the place, and had the necessary seals affixed to the property, and then waited for the arrival of the next-of-kin. Ten or twelve of them shortly appeared. Some of them were poor women without shoes or stockings, almost naked, carrying their babies wrapped up in ragged aprons; some of them were old men in tattered raiment, who hobbled along with a bundle of old clothes tied to a stick over their shoulders; it was a picture of misery. Now you may imagine what joy was spread around by the thought that each

of them would receive about ten thousand francs, for one might guess from the look of things that the curé had left property worth at least a hundred thousand francs. The seals were taken off, and I was busy all day long making an inventory of the goods. Night came at last, and the miserable heirs retired and left me alone. I was anxious to finish the business, to divide to each his share, and to get back to my own work. There was an old box which I found under a bureau; it had no lid, and was full of all sorts of papers, old letters, rough copies of the replies, ancient receipts, old accounts and bills and such like trash; but on an occasion like this one must look through everything and pass over nothing. I was just getting to the end of this wearisome task when I came across a rather long manuscript, and what do you think it was? A will! A will signed by the curé. A will so old that the executors he had appointed had been dead at least twenty years! In this will he had passed over these poor creatures who were sleeping near me, and left all his money to the Frémins, those wealthy book-sellers in Paris whom you, my son, know well. You may imagine my surprise and grief. And what was I to do with this will? Could I burn it? Why not? Was it not altogether an iniquitous will? And remember the place and the way in which I found it, carelessly dropped among a lot of old papers. Surely this was a proof that it was not intended to be acted on, to say nothing of its unjust tenour? I said all this over to myself, and pictured the terrible disappointment of the poor heirs who would thus lose the wealth they had just begun to look upon as their own. I drew near the fire with the will in my hand, but then fresh thoughts came into my mind and fears lest I should decide wrongly in such an important matter. I began to distrust my own judgment. I was afraid that the cry for pity which sounded in my soul would dull my ears to the call of justice, and all at once I stayed my hand. I spent the rest of the night thinking over the matter, sometimes holding the unjust document over the flames, and doubting whether I should burn it or not. At last I decided not to

burn it, but it was touch and go. In this perplexity I resolved to seek counsel from some earned person, and at dawn I mounted my horse and rode as fast as I could to the town; “passed my own door without stopping to enter, and went on till I reached the Seminary, then the home of the brethren of the Oratory. I knew one of them to be renowned for the saintliness of his life and the soundness of his judgment; his name was Father Bonin, and he left in this diocese the reputation of being an eminent casuist.”

My father had got so far when Dr. Bissei came in; he was the physician and family friend. He asked my father how he was, and felt his pulse, and gave orders about some change of diet; then he took a chair and began to chat with us.

My father asked after several of his patients, and amongst others about an old rogue of a steward to M. de la Mésangère, formerly the mayor of our town. This steward had behaved disgracefully, cheating his master in every way, borrowing money in his name, making away with deeds, appropriating other people’s money, and most of these knaveries were now proved, and he was going to suffer severe penalties for them, or perhaps even be hanged. The whole country was full of it. The doctor answered that his patient was very ill, but he hoped to pull him through.

My Father— “You won’t be doing him a kindness.”

I—” You will be doing a very bad action.”

Dr. B. “A very bad action? And, pray, tell me why.”

I—” There are so many wicked people in the world that those who wish to leave it should not be hindered.”

Dr B. “It is my business to cure, and not to judge him; I shall cure him because that is my business, and after that the judge may hang him, because that is his business.”

I—” But, doctor, there is one thing which is the business of every good citizen, yours and mine, to do everything we can for the good of the

Republic, and I hardly think it can be to the advantage of the Republic to save a malefactor who is going to be put to death immediately by the sentence of the law." Dr. B. "And whose business is it to declare him to be a malefactor? Is it mine?" I— "No, his actions prove him such."

Dr. B. "And whose business is it to judge his actions? Is it mine?"— "No, but allow me, doctor, to state the case in rather a different way. Suppose you are called to see a patient who is a notorious criminal; suppose that you go to the bedside, you draw aside the curtain and recognize Cartouche or Nivet. Would you do your best to cure Cartouche or Nivet?"

The doctor, after a moment's hesitation, answered with decision that he would cure them; he would forget who the patient was, and only trouble himself about the nature of the malady. It was the only thing it was his duty to think of; if he went a step further he would not know where to stop. It would be dangerous to expect a doctor to inquire into the way of life and morals of a patient before he consented to prescribe for him, it would be placing the lives of men at the mercy of the ignorant prejudices and the passions of a fellow-creature. He went on— "What you say of a Nivet, a Jansenist would say of a Molinist, a Catholic of a Protestant. If you drive me away from the bedside of the criminal Cartouche, a fanatic will forbid my visiting an Atheist. It is quite enough to dispense drugs to a patient without having to weigh and consider how wicked he is before we administer them."

"But, doctor," I answered, "suppose that the first thing the wretch does when you have cured him is to murder a friend of yours? What will you say then? Tell me honestly. Will you not be sorry that you cured him? Will you not cry out bitterly, 'Why did I help him? Why did I not let him die?' Would it not embitter you to the end of your days?"

Dr. B. "Of course I should feel dreadfully grieved, but I should never repent what I had done."

I—” And would you repent — I don’t say of killing, for that is not the question — but would you repent of letting a mad dog die? Listen to me, doctor. I have more courage than you; I will not allow myself to be checked by futile arguments. Say I am a physician, I visit a patient, I recognize a criminal; and this is what I say to him, ‘Wretch, make haste to die; you can do nothing better for yourself, nor for others. I know very well what would relieve this pain in your side which hinders your breathing, but I shall take good care not to give you the medicine which would cure you. I do not hate my fellow-citizens enough to send you back into their midst, and to prepare eternal regrets for myself when you commit fresh crimes. I will not be your accomplice. Whoever concealed you in his house would be punished, and can I hold him innocent who saves your life? It cannot be. My only regret is that in allowing you to die a natural death I am snatching you from the gallows. I will not spend my time in saving the life of a wretch whom by all the laws of nature and of equity and for the good of society I ought to denounce. Die, and let it not be said that owing to my efforts and cure there exists one monster more in the world.’”

Dr. Bessei— “Well, I must say good-bye” (turning to my father). “Now, don’t drink so much coffee after dinner. Do you hear?” My Father— “Ah, doctor, coffee is such an excellent thing.”

Dr. B. “At least take plenty of sugar with it.”

My Sister— “But sugar is heating, doctor.” Dr. B. “Rubbish! Good-bye, my philosopher.”

I—” Doctor, wait a moment and hear what Galien said who lived under Marcus Aurelius. He was no ordinary man, although he believed in amulets and in the evil eye, and yet this is what he says about his directions for preserving new-born children: ‘It is to the Greeks and Romans and all who follow their footsteps on the path of science that I address these remarks. As

for the Germans and other barbarians, they are no more worthy of them than bears and lions, and boars, and other wild beasts.'"

Dr. B. " I knew that. You are both wrong; Galien because he made such an absurd statement, and you because you quote him as an authority. You would not be alive now nor could you quote or praise Galien if Nature had not been able to keep alive the children of those Germans without his help."

I—" The last time that the plague raged in Marseilles—"

Dr. B. " Be quick, for I am in a hurry."

I—" There were some rogues who got into the houses, pillaging and killing, and taking advantage of the general confusion to enrich themselves by means of all sorts of crimes. One of these wretches was stricken with the plague, and was recognized by one of the gravediggers whom the police employed to bear away the dead. These men went round throwing the corpses into the street. The gravedigger looked at the criminal and said, 'Ah, you rascal, I've found you,' and he dragged him by the heels to the window. The wretch called out, 'I am not dead.' The other answered, 'You are dead enough for me,' and threw him at once out of the third floor window. Doctor, it seems to me that the gravedigger who pitched the plague-stricken rascal so readily out of the window was less to blame than a skilful doctor, like you, who should cure him. Now, go."

Dr. B. " Dear philosopher, I will admire your talent and ardour as much as you like, but your morality is neither mine nor that of the Abbé, I will wager that."

The Abbé— "Your wager is an easy one."

I was going to attack the Abbé when my father smiled and said —

"You are arguing against yourself."

I—" What do you mean?"

My Father— "You want that rogue M. de la Mésangère's agent to die, don't you? Well, leave him in the doctor's hands. What are you whispering

to yourself?"

*I — I say that Bissei will never deserve this inscription which the Romans placed over the door of Adrian IV.'s doctor after the Pope's death: 'The saviour of his country.'" My Sister— "*And if he had been Mazarin's doctor the carters would never have said of him as they did of Guénant after the minister's death: 'Comrades, give way and let the doctor pass; it is he who has been so kind as to kill the Cardinal.'"

My father smiled and said —

"Let me see; where did I leave off in my story?"

My Sister— "You got to where you consulted Father Bonin."

My Father— "I told him the facts. Father Bonin answered, 'Your feelings of pity for the poor heirs do you credit, my dear sir. And if you choose to suppress the will and help them I consent; but on condition that you pay the residuary legatee the exact amount of which you deprive him.' What a draught there is; go child and see if the doctor left the door open when he went out." My Sister— "I'll look, but pray don't go on with your story till I return."

My Father— "Of course not."

My sister was absent some little time, and came back saying rather crossly —

"It was that fool who has put up two notices on his door, on one of which is written: A house to be sold for 20,000 francs, or to be let, not on lease, for 1,200 francs a year. On the other is written: 20,000 francs to lend for a year at 6 per *cent.*"

I—" Is he such a fool? Supposing it is all one notice, and not two, the latter a translation of the former? But never mind that, let us go back to Father Bonin."

My Father— "Father Bonin added, 'Who has given you authority to set aside or carry out this deed? Who has authorized you to interpret the wishes

of the dead?' 'But remember, Father Bonin, the box was thrown aside.' 'Who has authorized you to decide whether the will was deliberately set aside, or whether it was accidentally mislaid? Did you never make such a mistake yourself, and discover at the bottom of an old tub some valuable paper which you had carelessly thrown in?'— 'But, Father Bonin, think how long ago the will was made and how unjust it is.' 'Who authorized you to decide whether the will is just or unjust, and what reason have you to consider the disposition of the property as unjust, and not rather a restitution or something equally legal which you may just as well imagine?' 'But, Father Bonin, these heirs in the direct line are poor, while the other is only a collateral and rich'

... 'Who has authorized you to judge what the deceased owed to his kinsfolk when you know little about the matter?' 'But consider, Father Bonin, what a heap of unopened letters are here from the legatee which the deceased had not taken the trouble to open!' I forgot to tell you," added my father, "that in the heap of papers where the unlucky will was found there were twenty or thirty letters of the Frémins, all with unbroken seals.

'There is nothing you can urge,' said Father Bonin, 'neither chest, nor date, nor letters, nor any ifs or buts which can weigh against the authority of the law. No person is allowed to transgress the law, or interpret the wishes of the dead, or dispose of the goods of another. If Providence has decided to punish either the heirs or the legatee, or the deceased, for we don't know which is meant to suffer, by the chance preservation of this will, let it be so.' After hearing such a positive and clear judgment from the mouth of one of the most enlightened of our clergy I remained stupefied. I trembled as I thought what might have happened to me, or to you, my children, if I had burnt the will as I had been tempted to do a dozen times. I should have been tormented with scruples after burning it, and should have gone to consult

Father Bonin. He would have urged restitution. I should, of course, have made restitution, and you would have been ruined."

My Sister— *"But*, father, you had now to go back to the vicarage and tell all those poor people that there was nothing for them, and that they must return empty-handed as they came. How hard it must have been for you, you who are so kind-hearted, to tell them that."

My Father— "I don't know how I did it. I first thought of giving up administering the will and entrusting it to a lawyer, but he would have carried out the strict letter of the law and turned all these poor people out of the house, while I might at least soften their disappointment. I, therefore, returned the same day to Thivet; my sudden departure and the precautions I took when leaving had already roused some uneasiness among them, and my melancholy looks on my return made them still more anxious. However, I tried to control my feelings and to conceal the news as well as I could."

I—" That means you did not hide it very well."

My Father— "I began by putting away all the valuables, and then I collected a certain number of the respectable inhabitants to help to keep order if it were necessary. I opened the cellar and the store-loft and gave up the contents to these poor folk, telling them they might eat and drink and divide among themselves the corn, the wine, and the provisions."

The Abbé— "But, Father—"

My Father— "Oh, I know very well it didn't belong to them at all."

I—" Now, Abbé, don't interrupt."

My Father— "Then pale as death, and trembling so that I could not stand, I sat down and opened my mouth to speak, but no words would come; I got up and began a sentence, but could not finish it for the tears that came. The poor frightened folk came round me crying out, 'What is the matter, dear sir?' 'What is the matter?' said I. 'A will; a will that disinherits you.' I could say no more, for I felt ready to faint."

My Sister— "I can fancy that."

My Father— "O, my children, what a terrible scene followed! I shudder when I recall it. I seem still to hear the cries of grief, anger, fury, and cursing. (Here my father put his hands up to cover first his eyes and then his ears.) I can still see those women, some rolling on the ground, tearing their hair, their cheeks, their breasts; others foamed at the mouth and held their children up by the heels ready to dash them on the ground if they had not been prevented. The men seized what they could lay hold of, overturning and breaking everything, and they threatened to set fire to the house; while others, howling, scratched up the earth with their nails, as if they were trying to find the parson's corpse to tear it to pieces; and piercing through all this disturbance came the shrill cries of the children, unconsciously influenced by their parents' despair, and who clung to them till they were brutally repulsed. I think I never suffered so much in my life. In the meantime I had written to the legatee and told him all the circumstances, begging him to hasten to the spot that he might prevent any sad consequences which it might be beyond my power to prevent. I was able somewhat to calm the poor heirs by holding out hopes to them that the legatee would renounce his rights, if not altogether, at least, in part, and this I thought he might do. I then dismissed them to find shelter in cottages as far as possible from the village. When Le Frémin arrived from Paris I eagerly scanned his features, but it was a hard face which promised no good."

I—" Great black bushy eyebrows, small eyes peering under half-closed lids, a large mouth a little awry, and a skin marked with smallpox."

My Father— "An exact description. He had come at once, only taking thirty hours to come sixty leagues. I began by pointing out to him the poor folk whose cause I wished to plead. They were gathered silently before him; the women were crying; the men, leaning on their sticks, stood bareheaded,

holding their caps in their hands. Le Frémin sat with closed eyes, his head a little bent, and his chin on his breast; he would not look at them. I pleaded earnestly for them; I don't know where I got my eloquence. I pointed out to him clearly how doubtful it was that the property had been really intended for him; I dwelt on his wealth and their poverty and need of it; I think I threw myself at his feet, adjuring him to have pity, but not a penny would he give up. He answered that he could not follow all my arguments and suggestions; there was a will, and he did not care to go into the question of how or when it was made, and that my action in the matter was of more importance than any words of mine. I was so indignant that I threw the keys in his face. He picked them up and took possession of everything, and I went home so miserable and worn out and altered in looks that your mother, who was alive then, thought that something dreadful had happened to me. O, my children, what a wretch that Frémin was!"

We were all silent when the narrative was ended, each one musing after his fashion on this strange story. Then some visitors came in; a fat prior, whose name I don't remember, who was a better judge of good wine than of questions of morality, and who had studied "The art of getting on" more than the "Lectures at Grenoble." The other visitors were a lawyer, a notary, a police officer called Dubois, and a little later came a workman, who asked to speak to my father. Another visitor was shown in at the same time — a retired civil engineer, who devoted his leisure to his old studies of mathematics; he was a neighbour of the workman, whose trade was a hatter.

The first thing the workman did was to hint to my father that he could not talk of his affairs before so many people. Everyone got up to go, except the prior, the lawyer, the engineer, and myself, who were begged by the hatter to remain.

"Monsieur Diderot," said he, to my father, having first looked round the room to see that there were no other listeners but ourselves, " it is my

confidence in your clear judgment and honesty which have led me to consult you, and I am not sorry also to meet these other gentlemen, who, perhaps, don't know me, but all of whom I know. Here are a priest, a lawyer, a scientific man, a philosopher, and a philanthropist. It would be strange if I could not obtain the good advice I need among all these gentlemen of such different occupations, all of whom are honest, clear-minded men."

Then the hatter said —

"Promise me to keep this matter secret, whatever course I may think fit to take."

We promised, and he went on to say —

"I have no children; my last wife, who died a fortnight ago, never bore me any. Since her death I have not lived; I can neither eat nor drink, nor work, nor sleep. I get up, and dress, and wander about the town with a gnawing trouble in my mind. I nursed my sick wife for eighteen years, and gave her every care and comfort that her sad state needed. The heavy expenses I incurred during her long illness have eaten up all my savings and left me burdened with debt; and when she died I found myself worn out and no longer young, and all the fruits of my labour gone — in fact, I shall be as badly off as when I started in life if I give up to her relations that portion of her dower which legally belongs to them. Her parents gave her a good outfit, for they were very fond of their daughter, and gave her as much, or more, than they could afford; good clothes and linen, which are quite new, for the poor woman could not wear them, and 20,000 francs. As soon as I had closed my wife's eyes I hid away the linen and money. Now you know my difficulty, gentlemen, did I do right, or did I do wrong? My conscience troubles me. I seem to hear something inside me saying, 'You are a thief! you are a thief! Restore! restore!' What do you think about it? Just think, sirs, that my wife had, as I may say, by her illness, deprived me of all my

earnings for twenty years, and now I am hardly fit to work; I am in debt, and if I give up this dower there is nothing for me but an almshouse, if not to-day, to-morrow. Tell me, sirs; I await your decision. Must I restore the money and go to an almshouse?"

"Not before you, sir," said my father, bowing to the priest; "will you speak first?"

"My son," said the prior to the hatter, "I am not fond of scruples; they muddle the brain without doing any good. Perhaps you should not have taken the money, but having taken it, I advise you to keep it."

My Father— "But, reverend sir, surely that is not your final answer?"

The Prior— "Upon my word, I don't know what else to say."

My Father— "You certainly have not looked at all sides of the question." Then, turning to the magistrate, "It is for you to answer now, sir."

The Magistrate— "My friend, you are in an awkward situation. Some people would advise you to settle the capital on your wife's collateral kinsmen, and to enjoy the interest yourself during your life. But there are laws, and the law allows you neither the interest nor the capital. Be advised by me; obey the law, be an honest man, and, if necessary, take refuge in the almshouse."

I—" There are laws, but what laws!"

My Father— "And you, my mathematical friend, what is your advice in this knotty matter?"

The Mathematician— "My friend, didn't you say that you had taken about 20,000 francs?"

The Hatter— "Yes, sir."

The Mathematician— "And about how much did your wife's illness cost you?"

The Hatter— "About the same amount." *The Mathematician*— "Well, then, if you take 20,000 francs from 20,000 francs there remains nothing."

My Father (to *me)*— “And what does philosophy say?”

I—” Philosophy is silent when the law is but folly.”

My father felt that it would not do to press me further, and turning at once to speak to the hatter —

“Mr. So-and-So,” said he, “you confess that since you robbed your wife’s heirs you have had no rest. And pray what is the use of money if it deprives you of the greatest of all benefits? Get rid of it as soon as possible, and then eat and drink, sleep and work, and be happy, either in your own home or wherever you may have to go.”

The hatter answered brusquely —

“No, sir, I shall go to Geneva.”

“Do you think you will leave your remorse behind you?”

“I don’t know; but I shall go to Geneva.”

“Go where you like, your conscience goes with you.”

The hatter left the room, and we talked over his strange answer. We agreed that perhaps distance of space or time does weaken more or less all kinds of feelings, all sorts of impressions, even the remorse of crime. The assassin who is carried away to the shores of China can no longer see the bloody corpse he left by the Seine. Perhaps remorse springs less from hatred of oneself than from the fear of others, less from shame for the crime than from the dread of rebuke and punishment which will follow on its discovery.

And what criminal has hidden his crime so securely that he does not dread that some unforeseen circumstance or careless word may one day betray him? How can he be sure that he may not reveal it in the delirium of fever or in a babbling dream? If he is overheard near the scene of the crime he is lost.

But in China he will be surrounded by people who know nothing about it. My children, the days of the wicked are full of disquiet. The good man

alone enjoys peace; he only can live and die without anxiety.

The discussion was over; the visitors left us, and only my brother and sister remained, and we now went on with our former conversation, my father saying —

“God be praised, we are by ourselves now. I like seeing other people well enough, but I prefer being alone with you.” Then, turning to me, he said, “Why did not you offer your advice to the hatter?”

“You stopped me.”

“Did I do wrong?”

“No, for no advice is good for a fool. What, is not this man his wife’s nearest relation? Was not the money he kept back given to him as her dowry? Has he not the best right to it? What right have her collateral kinsfolk to claim it?”

*My Father— “*You consider only the letter of the law, and not the spirit of it.”

I—” I see what you also, father, must have observed, how little security women would have, how they would be despised and ill-treated right and left by their husbands if the latter inherited the wife’s property at her death. But why should this law affect a man who has behaved well to his wife. ‘Have I not suffered enough in losing my wife,’ such a one may say, ‘and must I also be stripped of her property?’”

My Father— “But if you acknowledge the wisdom of the law, it seems to me that you should obey it.”

My Sister— “If there were no law there would be no theft.”

I—” You are mistaken, sister.”

My Brother— “Without law, everything belongs to everybody, and there is no such thing as property.”

I—” You are mistaken, brother.”

My Brother— “And what constitutes property?”

I—” It is originally what we earn by our labour. Nature has made wise laws from the very beginning; they are put in force by legal enactments, and these legal enactments press on the bad, but have no power over the good man. I am that good man, and in the circumstances we are discussing, and in many others which I will explain to you, I appeal to my own heart, to my conscience and to my reason — this is the court of natural equity to which I bring the legal enactments, and either submit to them or abrogate them.”

My Father— *“*Preach these doctrines on the housetops. I promise you they will be popular, and you will see what good results they will have.”

I—” I shall not preach them; there are truths which are not fit for fools. I shall keep them to myself.”

My Father— “For yourself, whom you consider the wise man!”

I—” Exactly so.”

My Father— “Then, I suppose, you don’t approve of my conduct in the affair of the priest of Thivet. But you, Abbé, what do you think of it?”

The Abbé— “I think, father, that it was very prudent of you to consult Father Bonin and to follow his advice; for if you had obeyed your first impulse we should have been completely ruined.”

My Father— “And you, great philosopher, are you not of the same opinion?”

I—” No.”

My Father— *“*A very short answer; give it more fully.”

I—” You command me?”

My Father— “Yes, certainly.”

I—” May I speak freely?”

My Father— “Yes, of course.”

I—” No, indeed” (I answered, warmly), “I am not of that opinion. I think that if you ever did a bad deed it was on that occasion; and that if you would have considered yourself obliged to repay the legatee after tearing up

the will, it is far more your duty to repay the heirs whom your course of action deprived of the estate."

My Father— "I must confess that the matter has always lain heavy on my heart; but Father Bonin—"

I—" Your Father Bonin, with all his reputation for logic and sanctity, was a bad reasoner, a narrow-minded bigot.".

My Sister, in a low voice— "Do you want to ruin us all?"

My Father— "Stop, leave Father Bonin in peace, and give us your own reasons without abusing anybody."

I—" My reasons are simple, and they are these. Either the testator wished to suppress the deed he had drawn up in the hardness of his heart; and everything seems to point to this, and you have made his retractation of no avail; or he wished his wicked will to be carried out, and you have been made the agent of his injustice."

My Father— "It is very easy to call it injustice."

I "Yes, yes, his injustice, for all the arguments that Father Bonin brought forward are futile; all his conjectures and surmises are vain, without value, compared to the circumstantial evidence which deprives the unjust will of all validity, a will which you brought to light out of a dusty cupboard, and insist on executing. You find a box full of old papers, and amongst them an old manuscript thrown aside. It stands condemned by its date, its injustice, by its being in a lot of rubbish, by the death of the executors, by the contempt shown to the legatee's letters, by the wealth of that legatee, and by the poverty of the true heirs! What can you set against that? You imagine that it was a restitution; you imagine that this poor priest, who hadn't a penny when he came to his parish, and who took eighty years of his life to save up about 100,000 francs, bit by bit, you imagine that he — who had never stayed in the Frémins' house, and who perhaps only knew them by name — had robbed them of 100,000 francs. And if the theft had been real,

for my part, I don't... I should have burnt the iniquitous will; I say you ought to have burnt it. You ought to have listened to the promptings of your own heart, which has been reproaching you ever since, and which knew much better what you should do than that fool Bonin. His decision only shows how formidable is the power exercised by religious ideas over the clearest brains, and how pernicious is the influence of unjust laws and of false principles upon common sense and natural equity. If you had been by the priest's side when he wrote that unjust will would you not have torn it in two? Chance throws it in your hands, and you keep it."

My Father— "And suppose the priest had made you his heir?"

I—" I should have destroyed the hateful will all the sooner."

My Father— "I don't doubt it; but is there not a difference to be made when you are not the heir, but it is left to someone else?"

I—" In both cases the will is either just or unjust, right or wrong."

My Father— "Now when the law orders that after death the papers of the deceased must all, without exception, be docketed and read, it has some reason for this, and, pray, what is the reason?"

I—" If I were sarcastic I should answer, 'To eat up the property by increasing the expenses;' but remember that you were not a lawyer, and were not bound to follow legal forms; your only duty was to act with benevolence and natural equity."

My sister was silent; but she squeezed my hand in token of approval. The Abbé shook his head, and my father said, "Another little attack on Father Bonin. At least you will grant that he, in the name of our religion, absolves me."

I—" So much the worse for your religion."

My Father— "And this will which you wish to burn at your own discretion, I suppose you allow that the court of law would have acknowledged its validity?"

I “Maybe; but so much the worse for the law.”

My Father— “Do you suppose the law would have set aside all the circumstantial evidence which you brought forward so forcibly?”

I—” I don’t know, but I should like to have made sure, and I would readily have sacrificed 50 louis in the cause of charity and have disputed the will in the name of the poor kinsfolk.”

My Father— “Oh, well, if you had been by me to give me that advice, although 50 louis is a tolerable sum when one is setting up in life, it is very probable that I should have taken your advice.”

The Abbé— “I would rather have distributed that sum to the poor heirs than to the lawyers.”

I—” And do you think, brother, that we should have lost our case?”

My Brother— “I have no doubt about it. The judges keep strictly to the law, as do my father and Father Bonin; and they are right. The judges in such cases shut their eyes to considerations of pity, just as my father and Father Bonin did, because they know what dangerous results would follow; and they are right. Even when their conscience urges them in an opposite direction, as in the case of my father and Father Bonin, they will sacrifice the cause of the poor and innocent lest they should open the door to a thousand knaveries; and they are right. They fear, just as my father and Father Bonin feared, to make law give place to equity in one particular case, because it would be hurtful in a thousand others and let loose endless disorder on society; and they are right. And in this particular case of the will — “*My Father*— “Your arguments would perhaps be of value in private, but they would not bear being brought forward in public. An unscrupulous lawyer might very well say to me in private, ‘Burn that will; “but he would not dare write such advice to his client.”

I—” I understand; it was not a matter to bring before a court of law. And, upon my word, if I had been in your place it should certainly not have gone

there."

My Father— "You would have set your opinion above that of the public, your judgment above that of the lawyers?"

I—" Certainly. Did not the man exist before the lawyer? Is not the judgment of the human race to be respected much more than that of the law-giver? We call ourselves civilized, and yet we are worse than savages. It appears that we must go on for centuries veering round from one extravagance to another, and from one error to another, till we arrive where the first spark of common sense, or even instinct alone, would have led us straight. And in consequence we have gone so far astray that—"

My Father— *"*Come, come, my son; common sense is a good bolster to rest one's head on, but I find that my head has a softer pillow in religion and law. Now don't begin to argue with me, for I don't wish to have a sleepless night. You seem to be getting provoked about it. Tell me now, supposing I had burnt the will, would you have tried to prevent my making restitution?"

I—" No, father; I care for your peace of mind more than all the money in the world." *My Father*— "Your answer pleases me, and for a good reason."

I "Will you tell us the reason?"

My Father— *"*Gladly. Your uncle, the Canon Vigneron, was a hard man; he did not get on well with his fellow canons, and was perpetually making them appear ridiculous by word and deed. You were intended to succeed him, but just as he was dying the family thought that it would be better to send in his resignation direct to the Ecclesiastical Court at Rome than to put it in the hands of the chapter, who might not accept it. The messenger started. Your uncle died an hour or two before the moment when the messenger was supposed to arrive, and there was the canonry and 1,800 francs lost. Your mother, your aunts, our relations, and our friends all advised me to conceal the canon's death, but I rejected their advice, and had the bell tolled for him at once."

I—" You were quite right."

My Father— "If I had listened to all these good women, and had been struck later by remorse, I see that you would not have, scrupled to give up your furred robe for my sake."

I—" Anyhow, I would rather be a good philosopher or nothing, than a bad canon." The fat prior came back at that moment, and overhearing my last words, "A bad canon," he said —

"I should like to know how one can be a good or bad prior, or a good or bad canon; the office is a matter of perfect indifference." My father shrugged his shoulders and retired to perform some private acts of devotion, which he was won't to fulfil.

The prior said —

"I have shocked your father a little."

My Brother— "Very possibly." Then taking a bock out of his pocket, he added, "I must read you a few pages of a description of Sicily, by Father Labat."

I—" I know them; they are the story of the shoemaker of Messina."

My Brother— "Exactly so."

*The Prior— "*And what did this shoemaker do?"

My Brother— "The historian says that he was a good man, and a lover of law and order, and that he had much to undergo in a country where the laws were not only imperfect, but were never enforced. Every day was marked by some crime. Men who were known to be assassins went about publicly holding up their heads and delying the popular indignation. Parents bewailed their daughters, dishonoured and reduced to misery by the cruelty of their seducers. Unjust monopolies prevented an industrious man gaining a living for himself and his children; all kinds of injustice drew tears from the oppressed citizens. Criminals escaped punishment either from their position, their wealth, or by the subterfuges of the law. The shoemaker

observed all this; his heart was smitten with grief, and he was constantly pondering in his mind, as he sat at his last, on some means of checking these malpractices."

The Prior— "What could a poor fellow like him do?"

My Brother— "You are going to hear. One day he set up a court of justice in his shop."

The Prior— "How did he manage that?"

I— "The prior wants me to tell my story as fast as he reads his matins."

The Prior— "Why not? Brevity is one of the arts of the orator, and the Gospel recommends short prayers."

My Brother—'

'As soon as he heard of some dreadful crime he drew up an accusation, and investigated all the circumstances carefully and secretly in his own house. When his double function of accuser and judge was over, the case settled, and the sentence pronounced, he went out with an arquebus under his cloak, and if he met the malefactors in some out of the way corner by day, or while they were prowling at night, he sent five or six balls through their bodies that justice might not suffer."

The Prior— "I very much fear that that good fellow was at last torn to pieces alive; I should regret it."

My Brother— "After the execution he left the body where it fell without going near it, and returned to his own dwelling as satisfied as a man would be who had killed a mad dog."

The Prior— "Did he kill many such mad dogs?"

My Brother— "More than fifty, and all men of some rank. The Viceroy offered 2,000 crowns to whoever would inform, and swore before the altar to forgive the offender if he would come forward."

The Prior— "What a fool!"

My Brother— “Being afraid that suspicion and punishment might fall on some innocent person—”

The Prior— “He presented himself to the Viceroy?”

My Brother— “He made the following speech: ‘It is I who have fulfilled *your* duty. It is I who have condemned and executed the criminals whom *you* ought to have punished. Here are the statements drawn up of their crimes and the evidence. You can thus follow my judicial proceedings. I was tempted to begin with *you*, but in your person I respected that of the august master whom you represent. My life is in your hands, and you may kill me if you choose.’”

The Prior— “Which, of course, was done.” *My Brother*— “I never heard, but I know that, in spite of this fine zeal for justice, t

he man was only a murderer.”

The Prior— “A murderer! That is too severe. What worse could you call him if he had assassinated innocent folk?”

I—” A noble madness.”

My Sister— “One might have wished— “*My Brother (to me)*— “Suppose that you are the King, and that this matter is brought-to you for judgment, what would you decide?”

I— “You are spreading a snare for me, Abbé, and I don’t mind if you do entrap me. I should condemn the Viceroy to take the cobbler’s place, and the cobbler to take the Viceroy’s.”

My Sister— “Quite right, brother.”

My father now returned with that look of serenity which he always has after his devotions. We told him the facts, and he confirmed the Abbé’s sentence. My sister added —

“And Messina was thus deprived of the only honest man she possessed, or at least of the only good citizen within her walls. I am sorry for that.”

Supper was now served, and there was a little more discussion, while we laughed at the prior for his judgment in the case of the hatter, and for the little esteem he had for priors and canons. We asked his opinion in the case of the will, but instead of giving it he told the story of something which had happened to himself.

The Prior— *"*You remember the great bankruptcy of the money-changer Bourmont?"

My Father— "Yes, of course, for I suffered somewhat by it myself."

The Prior— "So much the better."

My Father— "Why so much the better?" T*he Prior*— "Because if I did wrong my conscience is so much the more relieved. I was appointed agent for the creditors, and I found among the assets of Bourmont a bill of a hundred crowns on a poor neighbour, a corn chandler. If this bill had been divided between the whole body of creditors it would not have come to more than sixpence a piece; but if I had pressed the corn chandler to pay it it would have ruined him. I supposed— "*My Father*— "That each creditor would not have refused sixpence to the poor wretch; and so you tore up the bill and gave alms out of my purse."

The Prior— "Just so; are you angry?" *My Father*— "No."

The Prior— "If you will be good enough to believe that everyone else would judge me as leniently as you, there would be an end of the matter."

My Father— "But, my good sir, if on your private authority you tear up one bill, why should you not tear up two, or three, or four, according to the number of poor wretches whom you would help at other people's expense? This principle of pity may lead us too far, reverend sir; justice, justice—"

The Prior— "Is often a great injustice, as has been often said."

A young married woman who lived on the first floor came down to us; she was the personification of gaiety and folly. My father inquired what news she had of her husband.

This husband was an immoral man who had set his wife a bad example, which it was said she had somewhat followed. The husband, to escape from creditors, had fled to Martinique, and Madame Isigny (for that was the name of our lodger) answered my father —

"Monsieur d'Isigny? God be praised! I have not heard any more of him. Perhaps he is drowned."

The Prior— "Drowned! I congratulate you."

Mme. *d'Isigny*— "What business is it of yours, sir?"

The Prior— "None at all; but it may be yours?"

Mme. d'Isigny— "And what difference does it make to me?"

The Prior— "Well, they say—"

Mme. d'Isigny— "Pray what do they say?"

The Prior— "If you wish to know, they say that he found some letters of yours."

Mme. d'Isigny— "And haven't I got a fine collection of his?"

And now ensued an amusing dispute between the prior and Madame d'Isigny on the privileges of the two sexes.

Madame d'Isigny called upon me to help her, and I was going to prove to the prior that whichever of the two married persons broke the agreement the other was in consequence set free, but my father broke off the conversation by asking for his nightcap, and sent us off to bed. When it came to my turn to wish him good-night, I whispered in his ear as I kissed him —

"The truth is, father, that there is no law for the wise man—"

My Father— "Don't speak so loud."

I "As there must be exceptions to every law, it is the wise man who must decide when the law is to be obeyed and when it should be set aside."

My Father— "I should not much mind if there were one or two citizens in the town like you, but I would certainly not live there if they all thought the same."

Paradox of the Actor (1830)



Translated by Walter Herries Pollock, 1883

Original French Title: 'Paradoxe sur le comédien'

Written between 1770 and 1778, this dramatic essay was not published until after Diderot's death in 1830. It elucidates his theory of acting, in which he argues that great actors do not experience the emotions they are displaying. The text consists of a dialogue between two speakers; the first speaker espouses the views of Diderot on acting. He suggests that the great actor is characterised by a complete absence of any feeling and that the art of the great actor consists of displaying the illusion of feeling. His reasoning is that if the great actor were to become emotional he would not be able to play the same part on stage in repeat performances with the same success. Also, those actors that depend on feeling when performing usually give unpredictable and uneven performances. The great actor is, therefore, guided by his intelligence and not emotion. Once the great actor has studied and conceptualised his part through intelligence, he will give repeat performances successfully, irrespective of what is going on in his personal life.

Diderot goes on to argue that the character being played by the great actor can transcend the character envisioned by the author. He gives the example of Mlle. Clairon, who once played a character in a play authored by Voltaire. The playwright was in the audience at the time and had cried out "Did I write that?" on seeing her superb performance. Diderot accepts that a great actor like Mlle. Clairon could experience emotion when

portraying the character for the first time, but in repeat performances she would be in complete control of her emotions.



Clair Leris (1723-1803), known as Mademoiselle Clairon, was a French actress primarily known for developing a new style of acting in which she encouraged focus on the emotional connection between the actor and the character they played, instead of what she saw as the stiff portrayals of characters traditionally performed in one manner.



Denis Diderot by Dmitry Levitzky, Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Geneva, 1773

THE PARADOX OF ACTING



THE FIRST SPEAKER. Let us talk no more of that.

The Second Speaker. Why?

The First. It is the work of a friend of yours.

The Second. What does that matter?

The First. A good deal. What is gained by accepting the alternatives of holding his talent or my judgment cheap, of going back on the good opinion you hold either of him or of me?

The Second. That will not be the result; and were it so it would make no hole in my friendship for both of you, founded as it is on firmer grounds.

The First. May be.

The Second. It is so. Do you know of what you just now remind me? Of an author I know who fell on his knees to a woman he loved to beg her not to go to the first night of a piece of his.

The First. A modest man, and a prudent.

The Second. He was afraid that her affection might hang on the amount of his literary fame.

The First. Like enough.

The Second. That a public check might lessen him somewhat in his mistress's eyes.

The First. That loss of love would follow on loss of reputation. That strikes you as absurd?

The Second. It was thought to be so. The box was taken; he had a complete success; and you may guess how he was embraced, made much of, caressed.

The First. He would have been made all the more of if the piece had been hissed.

The Second. I am sure I am right.

The First. And I hold to my view.

The Second. Hold to it by all means; but remember that I at least am not a woman, and that I am anxious you should explain yourself.

The First. Absolutely?

The Second. Absolutely.

The First. I should find it much easier to say nothing than to veil what I really think.

The Second. Of course.

The First. I shall be uncompromising.

The Second. That is just what my friend would like you to be.

The First. Well then, as I must speak — his work, crabbed, obscure, complicated, bombastic as it is in style, is yet full of commonplace. A great dramatic artist will not be a bit the better, a poor actor not a bit the less inefficient, for reading it. It is Nature who bestows personal gifts — appearance, voice, judgment, tact. It is the study of the great models, the knowledge of the human heart, the habit of society, earnest work, experience, close acquaintance with the boards, which perfect Nature's gifts. The actor who is merely a mimic can count upon being always tolerable; his playing will call neither for praise nor for blame.

The Second. Or else for nothing but blame.

The First. Granted. The actor who goes by Nature alone is often detestable, sometimes excellent. But in whatever line, beware of a level mediocrity. No matter how harshly a beginner is treated, one may easily foretell his future success. It is only the incapables who are stifled by cries of 'Off! off!' How should Nature without Art make a great actor when nothing happens on the stage exactly as it happens in nature, and when dramatic poems are all composed after a fixed system of principles? And how can a part be played in the same way by two different actors when,

even with the clearest, the most precise, the most forceful of writers, words are no more, and never can be more, than symbols, indicating a thought, a feeling, or an idea; symbols which need action, gesture, intonation, expression, and a whole context of circumstance, to give them their full significance? When you have heard these words —

'Que fait là votre main?'
'Je tâte votre habit, l'étoffe en est moelleuse'

['Your hand — what does it there?'
'It feels your robe; 'tis soft and pleasant to the touch']

what do you know of their meaning? Nothing. Weigh well what follows, and remember how often and how easily it happens that two speakers may use the same words to express entirely different thoughts and matters. The instance I am going to cite is a very singular one; it is the very work of your friend that we have been discussing. Ask a French actor what he thinks of it; he will tell you that every word of it is true. Ask an English actor, and he will swear that, '*By God,* there's not a sentence to change! It is the very gospel of the stage!' However, since there is nothing in common between the way of writing comedy and tragedy in England, and the way of writing stage poems in France; since, according to Garrick himself, an actor who will play you a scene of Shakespeare to perfection is ignorant of the first principles of declamation needed for Racine; since, entwined by Racine's musical lines as if by so many serpents whose folds compress his head, his feet, his hands, his legs, and his arms, he would, in attempting these lines, lose all liberty of action; it follows obviously that the French and the English actors, entirely at one as to the soundness of your author's principles, are yet at variance, and that the technical terms of the stage are so broad and so vague that men of judgment, and of diametrically opposite views, yet; find in them the light of conviction. Now hold closer than ever

to your maxim, '*Avoid explanation if what you want is a mutual understanding!*'

The Second. You think that in every work, and especially in this, there are two distinct meanings, both expressed in the same terms, one understood in London, the other in Paris?

The First. Yes; and that these terms express so clearly the two meanings that your friend himself has fallen into a trap. In associating the names of English with those of French actors, applying to both the same precepts, giving to both the same praise and the same reproofs, he has doubtless imagined that what he said of the one set was equally true of the other.

The Second. According to this, never before was author so wrong-headed.

The First. I am sorry to admit that this is so, since he uses the same words to express one thing at the Cross-roads of Bussy and another thing at Drury Lane. Of course I may be wrong. But the important point on which your author and I are entirely at variance concerns the qualities above all necessary to a great actor. In my view he must have a deal of judgment. He must have in himself an unmoved and disinterested onlooker. He must have, consequently, penetration and no sensibility; the art of mimicking everything, or, which comes to the same thing, the same aptitude for every sort of character and part.

The Second. No sensibility?

The First. None. I have not yet arranged my ideas logically, and you must let me tell them to you as they come to me, with the same want of order that marks your friend's book. If the actor were full, really full, of feeling, how could he play the same part twice running with the same spirit and success? Full of fire at the first performance, he would be worn out and cold as marble at the third. But take it that he is an attentive mimic and thoughtful disciple of Nature, then the first time he comes on the stage as

Augustus, Cinna, Orosmanes, Agamemnon, or Mahomet, faithful copying of himself and the effects he has arrived at, and constantly observing human nature, will so prevail that his acting, far from losing in force, will gather strength with the new observations he will make from time to time. He will increase or moderate his effects, and you will be more and more pleased with him. If he is himself while he is playing, how is he to stop being himself? If he wants to stop being himself, how is he to catch just the point where he is to stay his hand?

What confirms me in this view is the unequal acting of players who play from the heart. From them you must expect no unity. Their playing is alternately strong and feeble, fiery and cold, dull and sublime. To-morrow they will miss the point they have excelled in to-day; and to make up for it will excel in some passage where last time they failed. On the other hand, the actor who plays from thought, from study of human nature, from constant imitation of some ideal type, from imagination, from memory, will be one and the same at all performances, will be always at his best mark; he has considered, combined, learnt and arranged the whole thing in his head; his diction is neither monotonous nor dissonant. His passion has a definite course — it has bursts, and it has reactions; it has a beginning, a middle, and an end. The accents are the same, the positions are the same, the movements are the same; if there is any difference between two performances, the latter is generally the better. He will be invariable; a looking-glass, as it were, ready to reflect realities, and to reflect them ever with the same precision, the same strength, and the same truth. Like the poet he will dip for ever into the inexhaustible treasure-house of Nature, instead of coming very soon to an end of his own poor resources.

What acting was ever more perfect than Clairon’s? Think over this, study it; and you will find that at the sixth performance of a given part she has every detail of her acting by heart, just as much as every word of her part.

Doubtless she has imagined a type, and to conform to this type has been her first thought; doubtless she has chosen for her purpose the highest, the greatest, the most perfect type her imagination could compass. This type, however, which she has borrowed from history, or created as who should create some vast spectre in her own mind, is not herself. Were it indeed bounded by her own dimensions, how paltry, how feeble would be her playing! When, by dint of hard work, she has got as near as she can to this idea, the thing is done; to preserve the same nearness is a mere matter of memory and practice. If you were with her while she studied her part how many times you would cry out, *That is right!* and how many times she would answer, *You are wrong!*

Just so a friend of Le Quesnoy's once cried, catching him by the arm, 'Stop! you will make it worse by bettering it — you will spoil the whole thing!'

'What I have done,' replied the artist, panting with exertion, 'you have seen; what I have got hold of and what I mean to carry out to the very end you cannot see.'

I have no doubt that Clairon goes through just the same struggles as Le Quesnoy in her first attempts at a part; but once the struggle is over, once she has reached the height she has given to her spectre, she has herself well in hand, she repeats her efforts without emotion. As it will happen in dreams, her head touches the clouds, her hands stretch to grasp the horizon on both sides; she is the informing soul of a huge figure, which is her outward casing, and in which her efforts have enclosed her. As she lies careless and still on a sofa with folded arms and closed eyes she can, following her memory's dream, hear herself, see herself, judge herself, and judge also the effects she will produce. In such a vision she has a double personality; that of the little Clairon and of the great Agrippina.

The Second. According to you the likest thing to an actor, whether on the boards or at his private studies, is a group of children who play at ghosts in a graveyard at dead of night, armed with a white sheet on the end of a broomstick, and fending forth from its shelter hollow groans to frighten wayfarers.

The First. Just so, indeed. Now with Dumesnil it is a different matter: she is not like Clairon. She comes on the stage without knowing what she is going to say; half the time she does not know what she is saying: but she has one sublime moment. And pray, why should the actor be different from the poet, the painter, the orator, the musician? It is not in the stress of the first burst that characteristic traits come out; it is in moments of stillness and self-command; in moments entirely unexpected. Who can tell whence these traits have their being? They are a sort of inspiration. They come when the man of genius is hovering between nature and his sketch of it, and keeping a watchful eye on both. The beauty of inspiration, the chance hits of which his work is full, and of which the sudden appearance startles himself, have an importance, a success, a sureness very different from that belonging to the first fling. Cool reflection must bring the fury of enthusiasm to its bearings.

The extravagant creature who loses his self-control has no hold on us; this is gained by the man who is self-controlled. The great poets, especially the great dramatic poets, keep a keen watch on what is going on, both in the physical and the moral world.

The Second. The two are the same.

The First. They dart on everything which strikes their imagination; they make, as it were, a collection of such things. And from these collections, made all unconsciously, issue the grandest achievements of their work.

Your fiery, extravagant, sensitive fellow, is for ever on the boards; he acts the play, but he gets nothing out of it. It is in him that the man of genius

finds his model. Great poets, great actors, and, I may add, all great copyists of Nature, in whatever art, beings gifted with fine imagination, with broad judgment, with exquisite tact, with a sure touch of taste, are the least sensitive of all creatures. They are too apt for too many things, too busy with observing, considering, and reproducing, to have their inmost hearts affected with any liveliness. To me such an one always has his portfolio spread before him and his pencil in his fingers.

It is we who feel; it is they who watch, study, and give us the result. And then... well, why should I not say it? Sensibility is by no means the distinguishing mark of a great genius. He will have, let us say, an abstract love of justice, but he will not be moved to temper it with mercy. It is the head, not the heart, which works in and for him. Let some unforeseen opportunity arise, the man of sensibility will lose it; he will never be a great king, a great minister, a great commander, a great advocate, a great physician. Fill the front of a theatre with tearful creatures, but I will none of them on the boards. Think of women, again. They are miles beyond us in sensibility; there is no sort of comparison between their passion and ours. But as much as we are below them in action, so much are they below us in imitation. If a man who is really manly drops a tear, it touches us more nearly than a storm of weeping from a woman. In the great play, the play of the world, the play to which I am constantly recurring, the stage is held by the fiery souls, and the pit is filled with men of genius. The actors are in other words madmen; the spectators, whose business it is to paint their madness, are sages. And it is they who discern with a ready eye the absurdity of the motley crowd, who reproduce it for you, and who make you laugh both at the unhappy models who have bored you to death and at yourself. It is they who watch you, and who give you the mirth-moving picture of the tiresome wretch and of your own anguish in his clutches.

You may prove this to demonstration, and a great actor will decline to acknowledge it; it is his own secret. A middling actor or a novice is sure to contradict you flatly; and of some others it may be said that they believe they feel, just as it has been said of some pious people that they believe they believe; and that without faith in the one case and without sensibility in the other there is no health.

This is all very well, you may reply; but what of these touching and sorrowful accents that are drawn from the very depth of a mother's heart and that shake her whole being? Are these not the result of true feeling? are these not the very inspiration of despair? Most certainly not. The proof is that they are all planned; that they are part of a system of declamation; that, raised or lowered by the twentieth part of a quarter of a tone, they would ring false; that they are in subjection to a law of unity; that, as in harmony, they are arranged in chords and in discords; that laborious study is needed to give them completeness; that they are the elements necessary to the solving of a given problem; that, to hit the right mark once, they have been practised a hundred times; and that, despite all this practice, they are yet found wanting. Look you, before he cries 'Zaïre vous pleurez,' or 'Vous y serez ma fille,' the actor has listened over and over again to his own voice. At the very moment when he touches your heart he is listening to his own voice; his talent depends not, as you think, upon feeling, but upon rendering so exactly the outward signs of feeling, that you fall into the trap. He has rehearsed to himself every note of his passion. He has learnt before a mirror every particle of his despair. He knows exactly when he must produce his handkerchief and shed tears; and you will see him weep at the word, at the syllable, he has chosen, not a second sooner or later. The broken voice, the half-uttered words, the stifled or prolonged notes of agony, the trembling limbs, the faintings, the bursts of fury — all this is pure mimicry, lessons carefully learned, the grimacing of sorrow, the magnificent aping which the

actor remembers long after his first study of it, of which he was perfectly conscious when he first put it before the public, and which leaves him, luckily for the poet, the spectator, and himself, a full freedom of mind. Like other gymnastics, it taxes only his bodily strength. He puts off the sock or the buskin; his voice is gone; he is tired; he changes his dress, or he goes to bed; and he feels neither trouble, nor sorrow, nor depression, nor weariness of soul. All these emotions he has given to you. The actor is tired, you are unhappy; he has had exertion without feeling, you feeling without exertion. Were it otherwise the player's lot would be the most wretched on earth: but he is not the person he represents; he plays it, and plays it so well that you think he is the person; the deception is all on your side; he knows well enough that he is not the person.

For diverse modes of feeling arranged in concert to obtain the greatest effect, scored orchestrally, played piano and played forte, harmonised to make an individual effect — all that to me is food for laughter. I hold to my point, and I tell you this: 'Extreme sensibility makes middling actors; middling sensibility makes the ruck of bad actors; in complete absence of sensibility is the possibility of a sublime actor.' The player's tears come from his brain, the sensitive being's from his heart; the sensitive being's soul gives unmeasured trouble to his brain; the player's brain gives sometimes a touch of trouble to his soul: he weeps as might weep an unbelieving priest preaching of the Passion; as a seducer might weep at the feet of a woman whom he does not love, but on whom he would impose; like a beggar in the street or at the door of a church — a beggar who substitutes insult for vain appeal; or like a courtesan who has no heart, and who abandons herself in your arms.

Have you ever thought on the difference between the tears raised by a tragedy of real life and those raised by a touching narrative? You hear a fine piece of recitation; by little and little your thoughts are involved, your heart

is touched, and your tears flow. With the tragedy of real life the thing, the feeling and the effect, are all one; your heart is reached at once, you utter a cry, your head swims, and the tears flow. These tears come of a sudden, the others by degrees. And here is the superiority of a true effect of nature over a well-planned scene. It does at one stroke what the scene leads up to by degrees, but it is far more difficult to reproduce its effect; one incident ill given would shatter it. Accents arc more easily mimicked than actions, but actions go straighter to the mark. This is the basis of a canon to which I believe there is no exception. If you would avoid coldness you must complete your effect by action and not by talk.

So, then, have you no objection to make? Ah! I see! You give a recitation in a drawing-room; your feelings are stirred; your voice fails you; you burst into tears. You have, as you say, felt, and felt deeply. Quite so; but had you made up your mind to that? Not at all. Yet you were carried away, you surprised and touched your hearers, you made a great hit. All this is true enough. But now transfer your easy tone, your simple expression, your every-day bearing, to the stage, and, I assure you, you will be paltry and weak. You may cry to your heart's content, and the audience will only laugh. It will be the tragedy outside a booth at a fair. Do you suppose that the dialogue of Corneille, of Racine, of Voltaire, or, let me add, of Shakespeare, can be given with your ordinary voice and with your fireside tone? No; not a bit more than you would tell a fireside story with the open-mouthed emphasis fit for the boards.

The Second. Perhaps Racine and Corneille, great names as they are, did nothing of account.

The First. Oh, blasphemy! Who could dare to say it? Who to endorse it? The merest word Corneille wrote cannot be given in everyday tone.

But, to go back, it must have happened to you a hundred times that at the end of your recitation, in the very midst of the agitation and emotion you

have caused in your drawingroom audience, a fresh guest has entered, and wanted to hear you again. You find it impossible, you are weary to the soul. Sensibility, fire, tears, all have left you. Why does not the actor feel the same exhaustion? Because there is a world of difference between the interests excited by a flattering tale and by your fellow-man's misfortune. Are you Cinna? Have you ever been Cleopatra, Merope, Agrippina? Are these same personages on the stage ever historical personages? Not at all. They are the vain images of poetry. No, nor even that. They are the phantoms fashioned from this or that poet's special fantasy. They are well enough on the stage, these hippogriffs, so to call them, with their actions, their bearing, their intonations. They would make but a sorry figure in history; they would raise laughter in society. People would whisper to each other, 'Is this fellow mad? Where in the world does this Don Quixote come from? Who is the inventor of all this stuff? In what world do people talk like this?'

The Second. And why are they not intolerable on the stage?

The First. Because there is such a thing as stage convention. As old a writer as Æschylus laid this down as a formula — it is a protocol three thousand years old.

The Second. And will this protocol go on much longer?

The First. That I cannot tell you. All I know is that one gets further away from it as one gets nearer to one's own time and country. Find me a situation closer to that of Agamemnon in the first scene of Iphigenia than that of Henri IV.: when, beset by fears only too well founded, he said to those around him, 'They will kill me; there is nothing surer; they will kill me!' Suppose that great man, that superb and hapless monarch, troubled in the night-watches with this deadly presentiment, got up and knocked at the door of Sully, his minister and friend — is there, think you, a poet foolish enough to make Henri say —

‘Oui, c’est Henri, s’est ton roi qui t’éveille;
Viens, reconnais la voix qui frappe ton oreille?’

(Ay, it is Agamemnon [Henri], ’tis thy King
That wakes thee; his the voice that strikes thine ear.)

Or to make Sully reply —

‘C’est vous-même, seigneur? Quel important besoin
Vous a fait devancer l’aurore de si loin?
A peine un faible jour vous éclaire et me guide,
Vos yeux seuls et les miens sont ouverts....’

[Is’t thou indeed, my lord? What grave concern
Has made thee leave thy couch before the dawn?
A feeble light scarce lets me see thy face,
No eyes but ours are open yet in Aulis....]

The Second. Perhaps Agamemnon really talked like that.

The First. No more than Henri IV. did. Homer talks like that; Racine talks like that; poetry talks like that; and this pompous language can only be used by unfamiliar personages, spoken from poetical lips, with a poetical tone. Reflect a little as to what, in the language of the theatre, is *being true*. Is it showing things as they are in nature? Certainly not. Were it so the true would be the commonplace. What, then, is truth for stage purposes? It is the conforming of action, diction, face, voice, movement, and gesture, to an ideal type invented by the poet, and frequently enhanced by the player. That is the strange part of it. This type not only influences the tone, it alters the actor’s very walk and bearing. And hence it is that the player in private and the player on the boards are two personages, so different that one can scarce recognise the player in private. The first time I saw Mlle. Clairon in her own house I exclaimed, by a natural impulse, ‘Ah, mademoiselle, I thought you were at least a head taller!’

An unhappy, a really unhappy woman, may weep and fail to touch you; worse than that, some trivial disfigurement in her may incline you to laughter; the accent which is apt to her is to your ears dissonant and vexatious; a movement which is habitual to her makes her grief show ignobly and sulkily to you; almost all the violent passions lend themselves to grimaces which a tasteless artist will copy but too faithfully, and which a great actor will avoid. In the very whirlwind of passion we would have a man preserve his manly dignity. And what is the effect of this heroic effort? To give relief and temperance to sorrow. We would have this heroine fall with a becoming grace, that hero die like a gladiator of old in the midst of the arena to the applause of the circus, with a noble grace, with a fine and picturesque attitude. And who will execute this design of ours? The athlete who is mastered by pain, shattered by his own sensibility, or the athlete who is trained, who has self-control, who, as he breathes his last sigh, remembers the lessons of the gymnasium? Neither the gladiator of old nor the great actor dies as people die in their beds; it is for them to show us another sort of death, a death to move us; and the critical spectator will feel that the bare truth, the unadorned fact, would seem despicable and out of harmony with the poetry of the rest.

Not, mark you, that Nature unadorned has not her moments of sublimity; but I fancy that if there is any one sure to give and preserve their sublimity it is the man who can feel it with his passion and his genius, and reproduce it with complete self-possession.

I will not, however, deny that there is a kind of acquired or factitious sensibility; but if you would like to know what I think about it, I hold it to be nearly as dangerous as natural sensibility. By little and little it leads the actor into mannerism and monotony. It is an element opposed to the variety of a great actor’s functions. He must often strip it from him; and it is only a head of iron which can make such a self-abnegation. Besides, it is far better

for the ease and success of his study, for the catholicity of his talent and the perfection of his playing, that there should be no need of this strange parting of self from self. Its extreme difficulty, confining each actor to one single line, leads perforce to a numerous company, where every part is ill played; unless, indeed, the natural order of things is reversed, and the pieces are made for the actors. To my thinking the actors, on the contrary, ought to be made for the pieces.

The Second. But if a crowd of people collected in the street by some catastrophe begin of a sudden, and each in his own way, and without any concert, to exhibit a natural sensibility, they will give you a magnificent show, and display you a thousand types, valuable for sculpture, music, and poetry.

The First. True enough. But will this show compare with one which is the result of a pre-arranged plan, with the harmony which the artist will put into it when he transfers it from the public way to his stage or canvas? If you say it will, then I shall make you this answer: What is this boasted magic of art if it only consists in spoiling what both nature and chance have done better than art? Do you deny that one can improve on nature? Have you never, by way of praising a woman, said she is as lovely as one of Raphael's Madonnas? Have you never cried, on seeing a fine landscape, 'It's as good as a description in a novel?' Again, you are talking to me of a reality. I am talking to you of an imitation. You are talking to me of a passing moment in Nature. I am talking to you of a work of Art, planned and composed — a work which is built up by degrees, and which lasts. Take now each of these actors; change the scene in the street as you do on the boards, and show me your personages left successively to themselves, two by two or three by three. Leave them to their own swing; make them full masters of their actions; and you will see what a monstrous discord will

result. You will get over this by making them rehearse together. Quite so. And then good-bye to their natural sensibility; and so much the better.

A play is like any well-managed association, in which each individual sacrifices himself for the general good and effect. And who will best take the measure of the sacrifice? The enthusiast or the fanatic? Certainly not. In society, the man of judgment; on the stage, the actor whose wits are always about him. Your scene in the street has the same relation to a scene on the stage that a band of savages has to a company of civilised men.

Now is the time to talk to you of the disastrous influence which a middling associate has on a first-rate player. This player's conception is admirable; but he has to give up his ideal type in order to come down to the level of the poor wretch who is playing with him. Then he says farewell to his study and his taste. As happens with talks in the street or at the fireside, the principal speaker lowers his tone to that of his companion. Or if you would like another illustration, take that of whist, where you lose a deal of your own skill if you cannot rely on your partner. More than this, Clairon will tell you, if you ask her, that Le Kain would maliciously make her play badly or inadequately, and that she would avenge herself by getting him hissed. What, then, are two players who mutually support each other? Two personages whose types are, in due proportion, either equal, or else in them the subordination demanded by the circumstances, as laid down by the poet, is observed. But for this there would be an excess, either of strength or of weakness; and such a want of harmony as this is avoided more frequently by the strong descending to the weak than by its raising the weak to its own level. And pray, do you know the reason of the numberless rehearsals that go on? They are to strike the balance between the different talents of the actors, so as to establish a general unity in the playing. When the vanity of an individual interferes with this balance the result is to injure the effect and to spoil your enjoyment; for it is seldom that the excellence of one actor can

atone for the mediocrity, which it brings into relief, of his companions. I have known a great actor suffer from his temperament in this way. The stupid public said he was extravagant, instead of discerning that his associate was inadequate.

Come, you are a poet; you have a piece for the stage; and I leave you to choose between actors with the soundest judgments and the coolest heads and actors of sensibility. But before you make up your mind let me ask you one question. What is the time of life for a great actor? The age when one is full of fire, when the blood boils in the veins, when the slightest check troubles one to the soul, when the wit blazes at the veriest spark? I fancy not. The man whom Nature stamps an actor does not reach his topmost height until he has had a long experience, until the fury of the passions is subdued, until the head is cool and the heart under control. The best wine is harsh and crude in its fermenting. It is by long lying in the cask that it grows generous. Cicero, Seneca, and Plutarch, I take to represent the three ages of composition in men. Cicero is often but a blaze of straw, pretty to look at; Seneca a fire of vine-branches, hurtful to look at; but when I stir old Plutarch's ashes I come upon the great coals of a fire that gives me a gentle warmth.

Baron, when sixty years old, played the Earl of Essex, Xiphares, Britannicus, and played them well. Gaussin, at fifty, bewitched her audiences in *L'Oracle et la Pupille.*

The Second. She cannot have looked the part.

The First. No; and here you hit perhaps an insurmountable obstacle to getting a perfect stage performance. For that your player must have trod the boards many years, and sometimes a part calls for the blush of youth. If there ever has been an actress who at seventeen could play Monimia, Dido, Pulcheria, Hermione, why then that is a miracle which will not be repeated. However, an old player does not become ridiculous until his strength has

quite left him, or until his fine art will not avail to outweigh the contrast between his real and his supposed age. As on the stage, so is it in the world, where people never fall foul of a woman's conduct unless she has neither talent nor other kind of merit enough to veil her failing.

In our days Clairon and Molé played when they first appeared like automata; afterwards they became fine players. Why was this? Did they, think you, acquire more soul, sensibility, heart, in proportion as they grew older?

It is not long since, after ten years' absence from the stage. Clairon consented to a reappearance. If she played but moderately, was it that she had lost her soul, her sensibility, her heart? Not at all; what she had lost was the memory of her methods. I appeal to the future to confirm me.

The Second. What! you believe she will come back to the stage?

The First. Or die of boredom. What substitute is there for the great passions and the house's plaudits?

If such or such an actor or actress were as deeply moved as people suppose, tell me if the one would think of casting an eye round the boxes, the other of smiling to some one at the wing, and, as almost all of them do, speaking straight to the pit; and if the call-boy would have to go to the greenroom and interrupt a third player in a hearty fit of laughter by telling him that it's time to go and stab himself?

Come, I will sketch you a scene between an actor and his wife who detested each other; a scene of tender and passionate love; a scene publicly played on the boards, just as I am going to rehearse it, or maybe a trifle better; a scene in which both players surpassed themselves — in which they excited continual bursts of applause from pit and boxes; a scene interrupted half-a-score of times with our clapping of hands and exclamations of delight. Their triumph was won in the third scene of the fourth act of

Molière's *Le Dépit Amoureux*. The actor plays Eraste, Lucile's lover. The actor's wife plays Lucile, Eraste's adored.

THE ACTOR

Non, non, ne croyez pas, madame,
Que je revienne encor vous parler de ma flamme.

(THE ACTRESS. I *just advise you.)*

C'en est fait.
(I *hope so.)*
Je me veux guérir et connais bien,
Ce que de votre cœur a possédé le mien.
(More than you deserved.)
Un courroux si constant pour l'ombre d'une offense,
(You offend me! You flatter yourself.)
M'a trop bien éclairci de votre indifférence:
Et je dois vous montrer que les traits du mépris,
(Yes, the deepest contempt.)
Sont sensibles surtout aux généreux esprits
(Yes, to generous minds.)
Je l'avouerai, mes yeux observaient dans les vôtres,
Des charmes qu'ils n'ont point trouvés dans tous les autres.
(Not for want of looking.)
Et le ravissement où j'étais de mes fers
Les aurait préférés à des sceptres offerts.
(You have made a better bargain.)
Je vivais tout en vous;
(*That's not the case; you tell a lie.)*
Et je l'avouerai meme
Peut-être qu'après tout j'aurai quoique outragé,
Assez de peine encore à m'en voir dégagé.
(That would be a bore.)
Possible que malgré la cure qu'elle essaie
Mon âme saignera longtemps de cette plaie.
(Don't be afraid — mortification has set in.)
Et qu'affranchi d'un joug qui faisait tout mon bien,
Il faudra me résoudre à n'aimer jamais rien.

(You'll find a way out of that.)
Mais enfin il n'importe; et puisque votre haine,
Chasse un cœur tant de fois que l'amour vous ramène,
C'est la dernière ici des importunités
Que vous aurez jamais de mes vœux rebutés.

THE ACTRESS

Vous pouvez faire aux miens la grâce tout entière,
Monsieur, et m'épargner encor cette dernière.

(THE ACTOR. *Sweetheart, you are an insolent baggage, and you shall live to repent this.)*

THE ACTOR

Eh bien, madame! eh bien! ils seront satisfaits,
Je romps avecque vous, et j'y romps pour jamais,
Puisque vous le voulez, que je perde la vie,
Lorsque de vous parler je reprendrai l'envie.

THE ACTRESS

Tant mieux, c'est m'obliger.

THE ACTOR

Non, non, n'ayez pas peur
(THE ACTRESS. *Afraid of you? Not I!)*
Que je fausse parole! Eussé-je un faible cœur,
Jusques à n'en pouvoir effacer votre image,
Croyez que vous n'aurez jamais cet avantage
(Ill-luck, you mean.)
De me voir revenir.

THE ACTRESS

Ce serait bien en vain.

(THE ACTOR. *My darling, you are an arrant wretch; but I'll teach you to behave*.)

THE ACTOR

Moi-même de cent coups je percerais mon sein.
(THE ACTRESS. *I wish to Heaven you would!)*
Si j'avais jamais fait cette bassesse insigne.
(*Why not, after so many others?)*
De vous revoir après ce traitement indigne.

THE ACTRESS

Soit; n'en parlons donc plus.

And so on, and so on. After this double scene — one of love, the other of marriage — as Eraste led his adored Lucile to the wing he squeezed her arm so hard as to tear his sweet wife's flesh, and answered her complaints with the bitterest insults.

The Second. If I had heard these two simultaneous scenes I don't think I should ever have set foot in a playhouse again.

The First. If you think this actor and actress were moved, let me ask you, was it in the lovers' scene, or the husband and wife's scene, or both? Now listen to another scene between the same actress and another player — her lover. While he is speaking his lines the actress says of her husband, '*He is a brute*. *He called me... I cannot repeat what he called me!*

While she, in turn, gives her lines, her lover replies, '*Aren't you accustomed to it by this time?*'

And so on from speech to speech. 'Do we sup together to-night?' 'By all means; but how can we escape observation?' 'That you must manage.' 'If he finds out?' 'It will make no odds; and we shall have a quiet evening.' 'Whom shall we ask?' 'Whom you like.' 'The Chevalier, to begin with; he is our mainstay.' 'Talking of him, do you know I could easily get up a jealousy of him?' 'And I could as easily give you cause for it.'

Thus, then, these sensitive creatures seemed to you to be heart and soul in the speeches spoken out loud, which you heard, while really they were immersed in the speeches spoken under their breath, which you did not hear. You exclaimed to yourself, ‘It must be admitted that she is a charming actress; no one listens so well as she does; and she plays with an intelligence, a grace, a conviction, a fine touch, a sensibility, by no means common.’ I meanwhile laughed at your exclamations.

Well, this actress plays her husband false with another actor, plays this other actor false with the Chevalier, and plays the Chevalier false with yet another person, with whom the Chevalier catches her. The Chevalier plots a mighty vengeance. He takes his place in the lowest part of the stage-seats (the Comte de Lauraguais had not then rid our stage of this arrangement). Stationed thus he looked forward to disconcerting the faithless wretch by his presence, and by his contemptuous looks to completely upsetting her, and getting her hooted by the pit. The piece begins; the traitress appears; she sees the Chevalier, and without any disturbance to her acting she says to him, with a smile, ‘Ah! silly fellow, making a fuss for nothing!’ The Chevalier smiles in his turn, and she goes on: ‘You are coming to-night?’ He makes no answer, and she continues: ‘Let us make an end of this foolish quarrel; and do you order up your carriage.’ And do you know in what scene she put in all this? It was in one of the most touching scenes of La Chaussée, a scene in which the actress was convulsed with sobs and made us drop scalding tears. This startles you; yet it is an exact statement of fact.

The Second. It’s enough to sicken one of the stage.

The First. And why, pray? If this kind of people could not achieve such feats, what business would they have on the stage? Now I will tell you a thing I have actually seen.

Garrick will put his head between two folding-doors, and in the course of five or six seconds his expression will change successively from wild

delight to temperate pleasure, from this to tranquillity, from tranquillity to surprise, from surprise to blank astonishment, from that to sorrow, from sorrow to the air of one overwhelmed, from that to fright, from fright to horror, from horror to despair, and thence he will go up again to the point from which he started. Can his soul have experienced all these feelings, and played this kind of scale in concert with his face? I don't believe it; nor do you. If you ask this famous man, who in himself is as well worth a visit to England as the ruins of Rome are worth a visit to Italy; if you ask him, I say, for the scene of the Pastrycook's Boy he will play it for you; if you asked him directly afterwards for the great scene in *Hamlet* he would play it for you. He was as ready to cry over the tarts in the gutter as to follow the course of the air-drawn dagger. Can one laugh or cry at will? One shall make a show of doing so as well or ill as one can, and the completeness of the illusion varies as one is or is not Garrick.

I play the fool in this sort sometimes, and with success enough to take in men who have knocked about the world a great deal. When I go distracted over the pretended death of my sister in the scene with the Norman lawyer; when in the scene with the First Clerk of the Admiralty I confess to the paternity of the child of a captain's wife; I seem exactly as if I suffered grief and shame: but do I suffer either? Not a bit more now that the thing is in definite stage shape than originally in private company, where I invented these two parts before putting them into a stage play. What, then, is a great actor? A man who, having learnt the words set down for him by the author, fools you thoroughly, whether in tragedy or comedy.

Sedaine produces the *Philosophe sans le Savoir*. I took more interest in the piece's success than he did; envy of others' talents is not among my vices; I have enough indeed without it. I may call to witness all my brothers in literature, if, whenever they have deigned to consult me as to their work, I have not done all I could to give a fitting answer to this high mark of

esteem. The *Philosophe sans le Savoir* trembles in the balance at the first and second performances, and I am very sorry for it; at the third it goes like wildfire, and I am delighted. The next morning I jump into a coach and rush to find Sedaine. It was winter and horribly cold, but I went everywhere where I could hope to find him. I am told he is in the depths of the Faubourg St. Antoine, and my driver takes me there. I rush up to him, I throw my arms round his neck, my voice fails me, and tears run down my checks. There you have the man of sensibility, the middling man. Sedaine, reserved and still, looks at me and says, 'Ah! Monsieur Diderot, you are splendid!' There you have the man of observation — the man of genius.

I told this story one day at table in the house of a man whose high talents marked him for the greatest place in the State — in the house of M. Necker. There were many men of letters there; amongst them Marmontel, who is my friend as I am his. He said to me with an ironical air, 'Then, if Voltaire is overcome by the mere narrative of a pathetic incident, and Sedaine is undisturbed by the sight of a friend in tears, Voltaire is the ordinary man and Sedaine the man of genius.' This apostrophe put me out, and reduced me to silence, because the man of sensibility, like me, is wrapped up in the objection to his argument, loses his head, and does not find his answer until he is leaving the house. A cold and self-possessed person might have replied to Marmontel, 'Your observation would come better from other lips than yours, for you feel no more than Sedaine, and you too turn out fine work. You, being in the same line with him, might have left it to some one else to be an impartial judge of his talent. But, without preferring Sedaine to Voltaire, or Voltaire to Sedaine, can you tell me what would have come out of the brains of the author of the *Philosophe sans le Savoir,* of the *Déserteur,* and of *Paris Sauvé,* if, instead of passing thirty-five years of his life in damping plaster and cutting stone, he had spent all this time, like Voltaire, like you and me, in reading and thinking on Homer, Virgil, Tasso,

Cicero, Demosthenes, and Tacitus? We could never learn to see things as he does; he might have learnt to tell them as we do. I look upon him as one of the latest posterity of Shakespeare; of Shakespeare, whom I shall compare neither to the Apollo Belvedere nor to the Gladiator, nor to Antinous, nor to the Farnese Hercules, but rather to the Saint Christopher in Notre Dame — a shapeless Colossus, coarsely sculptured, if you will. Yet we might all walk between his legs and never a head reach to his thighs.'

Now here is another instance of a man reduced at one moment to flat stupidity by sensibility, and the next rising to sublimity by the self-possession following the stifling of his sensibility.

A man of letters, whose name I will hold back, had fallen into great poverty. He had a wealthy brother, a theologian. I asked the poor brother why the rich one did not help him. 'Because,' he replied, 'he thinks very ill of me.' I obtained his leave to go and see the theologian. I went, was announced, and told the theologian I had come to talk about his brother. He took me by the hand, made me sit down, and then pointed out that a man of sense takes care to know the client whose case he takes up. Then he said, with some liveliness, 'Do you know my brother?' 'I think so.' 'Do you know his conduct to me?' 'I think so.' 'You do? Then you know...' and herewith my theologian sets off to tell me, with astonishing rapidity and energy, a whole chain of infamies, the one more revolting than the other. My senses feel confused; I am overwhelmed; I lack courage to plead for so vile a wretch as is presented to my view. Luckily the theologian, growing prolix in his philippic, gave me time to recover. By degrees the man of sensibility disappeared, and made way for the man of eloquence; for I may venture to say that on this occasion I was eloquent. 'Sir,' said I coldly to the theologian, 'your brother has done worse than this, and I admire you for concealing the worst of his infamies.' 'I conceal nothing.' 'To all you have told me you might have added that one night, as you left your house to go to

matins, he caught you by the throat, and drawing a dagger from beneath his dress was about to plunge it in your bosom.' 'He is quite capable of it; but I have not accused him of it because he never did it.' Then rising suddenly, and fixing a firm, stern look on my theologian, I cried in accents of thunder, and with all the force and emphasis indignation can give, 'And had he done it, would that be a reason for refusing your brother bread?' The theologian, overborne, overwhelmed, confounded, held his peace, walked about the room, came back to me, and granted me an annual allowance for his brother.

Is it at the moment when you have just lost your friend or your adored one that you set to work at a poem on your loss? No! ill for him who at such a moment takes pleasure in his talent. It is when the storm of sorrow is over, when the extreme of sensibility is dulled, when the event is far behind us, when the soul is calm, that one remembers one's eclipsed happiness, that one is capable of appreciating one's loss, that memory and imagination unite, one to retrace the other to accentuate, the delights of a past time: then it is that one regains self-possession and expression. One writes of one's falling tears, but they do not fall while one is hunting a strong epithet that always escapes one; one writes of one's falling tears, but they do not fall while one is employed in polishing one's verse; or if the tears do flow the pen drops from the hand: one falls to feeling, and one ceases writing.

Again, it is with intense pleasure as with intense pain — both are dumb. A tender-hearted and sensitive man sees again a friend he has missed during a long absence; the friend makes an unexpected reappearance, and the other's heart is touched; he rushes to him, he embraces him, he would speak, but cannot; he stammers and trips over his words; he says he knows not what, he does not hear the answer: if he could see that the delight is not mutual, how hurt he would be! Judge, this picture being true, how untrue are the stage meetings, where both friends are so full of intelligence and

self-control. What could I not say to you of the insipid and eloquent disputes as to who is to die, or rather who is not to die, but that this text, on which I should enlarge for ever, would take us far from our subject? Enough has been said for men of true and fine taste; what I could add would teach nothing to the rest. Now, who is to come to the rescue of these absurdities so common on the stage? The actor? and what actor?

The circumstances in which sensibility is as hurtful in society as on the stage are a thousand to one. Take two lovers, both of whom have their declaration to make. Who will come out of it best? Not I, I promise you. I remember that I approached the beloved object with fear and trembling; my heart beat, my ideas grew confused, my voice failed me, I mangled all I said; I cried *yes* for *no;* I made a thousand blunders; I was illimitably inept; I was absurd from top to toe, and the more I saw it, the more absurd I became. Meanwhile, under my very eyes, a gay rival, light-hearted and agreeable, master of himself, pleased with himself, losing no opportunity for the finest flattery, made himself entertaining and agreeable, enjoyed himself; he implored the touch of a hand which was at once given him, he sometimes caught it without asking leave, he kissed it once and again. I the while, alone in a corner, avoiding a sight which irritated me, stifling my sighs, cracking my fingers with grasping my wrists, plunged in melancholy, covered with a cold sweat, I could neither show nor conceal my vexation. People say of love that it robs witty men of their wit, and gives it to those who had none before: in other words, makes some people sensitive and stupid, others cold and adventurous.

The man of sensibility obeys the impulse of Nature, and gives nothing more or less than the cry of his very heart; the moment he moderates or strengthens this cry he is no longer himself, he is an actor.

The great actor watches appearances; the man of sensibility is his model; he thinks over him, and discovers by after-reflection what it will be best to

add or cut away. And so from mere argument he goes to action.

At the first performance of *Inès de Castro*, and at the point where the children appear, the pit fell to laughing. Duclos, who was playing Inez, was angered, and cried to the pit: ‘Laugh, you blockheads, at the finest point in the piece!’ The pit listened, and was silent; the actress went on with her part, and her tears and the spectators’ flowed together. Tell me now, Can one pass and repass in this way from one deep feeling to another, from sorrow to anger, from anger to sorrow? I cannot think it; what I can very well think is, that Duclos’s anger was real, her sorrow pretended.

Quinault-Dufresne plays the part of Severus in *Polyeucte*. Sent by the Emperor to harry the Christians, he confides to a friend his real feeling about the calumniated sect. Common sense demanded that this confidence, which might cost him the prince’s favour, his honours, his fortune, his liberty, perhaps his life, should be uttered in a low tone. The pit called out, ‘Speak louder!’ He replied, ‘And do you, Sirs, speak less loud!’ Had he really been Severus, could he so quickly have again become Quinault? No, I tell you, no. Only the man of self-possession, such as he no doubt had, the exceptional actor, the player who is before all a player, can so drop and again assume his mask.

Lekain-Ninias enters his father’s tomb, and there cuts his mother’s throat; he comes out with blood-stained hands. He is horror-stricken; his limbs tremble, his eyes roll wildly, his hair stands on end. So does yours to see him; terror seizes on you, you are as lost as he is. However, Lekain-Ninias sees a diamond drop which has fallen from an actress’s ear, and pushes it towards the wing with his foot. And this actor feels? Impossible. You will not call him a bad actor? Of course not. What, then, is Lekain-Ninias? A cold man, who is without feeling, but who imitates it excellently. It is all very well for him to cry out, ‘Where am I?’ I answer, ‘Where are

you? You know well enough. You are on the boards, and you are in the act of kicking a diamond drop off the stage.'

An actor has a passion for an actress; they come together by chance in a stage scene of jealousy. If the actor is poor the scene will be improved; if he is a real player it will lose: in such a case the fine actor becomes himself, and is no longer the grand and ideal type of a jealous man that he has striven for. The proof that if this be so the actor and actress lower themselves to everyday life is, that if they kept to their stilts they would laugh in each other's faces; the bombastic jealousy of tragedy would seem to them a mere clowning of their own.

The Second. All the same there are truths of Nature.

The First, Yes, as in a statue by a sculptor who has given a close transcript of a bad model. You may admire the exactitude, but the whole effect is poor and wretched.

I will go further. A sure way to act in a cramped, mean style, is to play one's own character. You are, let us say, a tartufe, a miser, a misanthrope; you may play your part well enough, but you will not come near what the poet has done. He has created the Tartufe, *the* Miser, *the* Misanthrope.

The Second. And how do you make out the difference between *a* tartufe and *the* Tartufe?

The First. Billard, the clerk, is a tartufe; Grizel, the abbé, is a tartufe, but he is not *the* Tartufe. Toinard, the banker, was a miser, but he was not *the* Miser. *The* Miser, *the* Tartufe, were drawn from the Toinards and Grizels in the world; they contain their broadest and most marked features, but there is in them no exact portrait of a given individual; and that is why the real people don't recognise themselves in their types. The comedy that depends on 'go,' even the comedy of character, is an exaggeration. The fun of society is a light froth, which evaporates on the stage; the fun of the stage is

an edged tool which would cut deep in society. For imaginary beings we have not the consideration we are bound to have for real beings.

Satire deals with *a* tartufe; comedy with *the* Tartufe. Satire attacks the vicious; comedy attacks a vice. If there had been only one or two *Précieuses ridicules* in the world they would have afforded matter for a satire, but not for a comedy.

Go to La Grenée, and ask him for a picture of *Painting;* he will think he has done what you want when he has put on his canvas a woman before an easel with her thumb through a palette and a brush in her hand. Ask him for *Philosophy;* he will think he has given it you by producing a woman in careless attire resting her elbow on a desk by lamplight, dishevelled and thoughtful, reading or meditating. Ask him for *Poetry;* he will paint the same woman with a laurel-wreath round her brows and a roll of manuscript in her hand. For *Music,* you shall see the same woman with a lyre instead of the roll. Ask him for *Beauty;* ask the same from a cleverer man than him; and, unless I am much mistaken, he will be persuaded that all you want from his art is a picture of a handsome woman. The same fault is common to your actor and to this painter; and I would say to them, 'Your picture, your acting, are mere portraits of individuals far below the general idea traced by the poet and the ideal type of which I hoped to have a representation. This lady of yours is as handsome as you like; but she is not Beauty. There is the same difference between your work and your model as between your model and the type.'

The Second. But, after all, this ideal type may be a phantom!

The First. No.

The Second. But since it is ideal it is not real; and you cannot understand a thing that is impalpable.

The First. True. But let us take an art, say sculpture, at its beginning. It copied the first model that came to hand. Then it saw that there were better

models, and took them for choice. Then it corrected first their obvious, then their less obvious fault, until by dint of long study it arrived at a figure which was no longer nature.

The Second. Why, pray?

The First. Because the development of a machine so complex as the human body cannot be regular. Go to the Tuileries or the Champs Élysées on a fete-day; look at all the women in the walks, and you will not find one in whom the two corners of the mouth are exactly alike. Titian's Danae is a portrait; the Love at the foot of the couch is an ideal. In a picture of Raphael's, which went from M. de Thiers' collection to Catherine the Second's, St. Joseph is a common-place man; the Virgin is a real and a beautiful woman; the infant Christ is an ideal. But if you would like to know more as to these speculative principles of art I will send you my *Salons.*

The Second. I have heard the work praised by a man of fine taste and keen discernment.

The First. M. Suard.

The Second. And by a woman who combines an angel's purity with the finest taste.

The First. Madame Necker.

The Second. Let us go back to our subject.

The First. By all means; though I would rather sing the praises of virtue than discuss somewhat idle questions.

The Second. Quinault-Dufresne, a boaster by nature, played the Boaster splendidly.

The First. You are right; but how do you know that he was playing his own self? And why should not Nature have made a boaster very near the line between the fine real and the fine ideal, the line on which the different schools find their exercise-ground?

The Second. I do not understand you.

The First. I have explained myself more fully in my *Salons,* in which I commend to your notice the passage on Beauty in general. Meanwhile tell me this: Is Quinault-Dufresne Orosmanes? No. However, who has taken his place, or ever will take his place, in this part? Was he the man for the *Préjugé à la Mode*? No. Yet with how much truth he played it!

The Second. According to you the great actor is everything and nothing.

The First. Perhaps it is just because he is nothing that he is before all everything. His own special shape never interferes with the shapes he assumes.

Among all those who have practised the fine and valuable profession of actors or lay preachers, one of the most sterling characters, one who showed it the most in his physiognomy, his tone, his bearing, the brother of the *Diable Boiteux* of Gil Blas, of the *Bachelier de Salamanque,* Montmesnil....

The Second. Son of Le Sage, the father of the illustrious family you have named.

The First.... played, with equal success, Aristides in the *Pupille,* Tartufe in the comedy so named, Mascarille in the *Fourberies de Scapin,* the lawyer, or M. Guillaume, in the farce of *Patelin.*

The Second. I have seen him.

The First. And to your astonishment, for all these different parts he had a fitting visage. This did not come by Nature, for Nature had given him but one, his own; the others he drew from Art.

Is there such a thing as artificial sensibility? Consider, sensibility, whether acquired or inborn, is not in place in all characters. What, then, is the quality acquired which makes an actor great in *l'Avare, le Joueur, le Flatteur, le Grondeur, le Médecin malgré lui* (the least sensitive or moral personage yet devised by a poet), *le Bourgeois Gentilhomme, le Malade Imaginaire, le Cœur Imaginaire* — in Nero, in Mithridates, in Atreus, in

Phocas, in Sertorius, and in a host of other characters, tragic and comic, where sensibility is diametrically opposed to the spirit of the part? It is the faculty of knowing and imitating all natures. Believe me, we need not multiply causes when one cause accounts for all appearances.

Sometimes the poet feels more deeply than the actor; sometimes, and perhaps oftener, the actor's conception is stronger than the poet's; and there is nothing truer than Voltaire's exclamation, when he heard Clairon in a piece of his, 'Did I really *write that?*' Does Clairon know more about it than Voltaire? Anyhow, at that moment the ideal type in the speaking of the part went well beyond the poet's ideal type in the writing of it. But this ideal type was not Clairon. Where, then, lay her talent? In imagining a mighty shape, and in copying it with genius. She imitated the movement, the action, the gesture, the whole embodiment of a being far greater than herself. She had learnt that Æschines, repeating a speech of Demosthenes, could never reproduce 'the roar of the brute.' He said to his disciples, 'If this touches you, or nearly, what would have been the effect *si audivissetis bestiam mugientem* [had you heard the roaring beast]?' The poet had engendered the monster, Clairon made it roar.

It would be a strange abuse of language to give the name of sensibility to this faculty of reproducing all natures, even ferocious natures. Sensibility, according to the only acceptation yet given of the term, is, as it seems to me, that disposition which accompanies organic weakness, which follows on easy affection of the diaphragm, on vivacity of imagination, on delicacy of nerves, which inclines one to being compassionate, to being horrified, to admiration, to fear, to being upset, to tears, to faintings, to rescues, to flights, to exclamations, to loss of self-control, to being contemptuous, disdainful, to having no clear notion of what is true, good, and fine, to being unjust, to going mad. Multiply souls of sensibility, and you will multiply in

the same proportion good and bad actions of every kind, extravagant praise and extravagant blame.

Work, poets, for a nation given to vapours, and sensitive; content yourselves with the tender, harmonious, and touching elegies of Racine; this nation would flee the butcheries of Shakespeare; its feeble spirit cannot stand violent shocks; beware of offering it too vigorous a picture; rehearse to it, if you will,

> ‘Le fils tout dégouttant du meurtre de son père,
> Et sa tête à la main, demandant son salaire.’
>
> [The son all bloodied from the murder of his sire,
> Bearing the severed head and clamant for his hire.]

But go no further. If you dared to say with Homer, ‘Whither goest thou, unhappy one? Thou know’st not, then, that it is to me Heaven sends the children of ill-fated fathers; thou wilt not receive thy mother’s last embraces; e’en now I see thee stretched on the earth; the birds of prey, grouped round thy corpse, tear out thine eyes, flapping their wings with delight’ — If you said this all the women, turning away their heads, would cry, ‘Oh! horrible!’... And it would be all the worse if this speech, delivered by a great actor, had all the strength of truthful accent.

The Second. I am tempted to interrupt you to ask what you think of the bowl presented to Gabrielle de Vergy, who saw in it her lover’s bleeding heart.

The First. I shall answer you that we must be consistent, and if we are revolted at this spectacle neither must we permit Œdipus to show himself with his eyes torn out, while we must drive Philoctetes, tormented by his wound, and expressing his pain with inarticulate cries, off the stage. The ancients had, as I think, an idea of tragedy different from ours; and these ancients — that is the Greeks, that is the Athenians, this fine people, who

have left us models in every direction of art unequalled by other nations — Æschylus, I say, Sophocles, Euripides, were not at work for years together to produce the trifling passing impressions which disappear in the gaiety of a supper-party. It was their object to rouse a deep grief for the lot of the ill-fated; it was their object not only to amuse their fellow-citizens but also to make them better. Were they wrong? Were they right? To produce their effect they made the Eumenides rush on the scene, tracking the parricide and guided by the scent of blood in their nostrils. They had too much taste to approve the imbroglios, the jugglings with daggers, which are fit only for children. A tragedy is, to my thinking, nothing but a fine page of history divided into a certain number of marked periods. Thus, we are waiting for the sheriff. He arrives. He questions the squire of the village. He proposes apostasy to him. The other refuses. He condemns him to death. He sends him to prison. The daughter implores mercy for her father. The sheriff will grant it; but on a revolting condition. The squire is put to death. The inhabitants rush on the sheriff. He flies before them. The lover of the squire's daughter strikes him dead with one dagger thrust, and the abominable fanatic dies cursed by all around him. A poet does not need much more material for a great work. Suppose the daughter goes to her mother's tomb to learn her duty to the author of her being; suppose that she is in doubt about the sacrifice of honour demanded from her; that in this doubt she keeps her lover aloof, and will not hear the language of his passion; that she obtains leave to visit her father in prison; that her father wishes to marry her and her lover, and she refuses; that she does sacrifice her honour, and her father is put to death the while; that you are unaware of her fate until her lover, when she is distracted with grief at her father's death, learns what she has done to save him; that then the sheriff comes in hunted by the mob and is struck down by the lover. There you have part of the details of such a work.

The Second. Part?

The First. Yes, part. Will not the young lovers propose flight to the squire? Will not the villagers propose to him to exterminate the sheriff and his satellites? Will there not be a priest who preaches toleration? And in the midst of this terrible day will the lover be idle? And cannot one suppose certain ties between these characters, and make something out of such ties? Why should not the sheriff have been a suitor of the squire's daughter? Why should he not return with vengeance in his heart against the squire, who has turned him out of the place, and the daughter, who has scorned his suit? What important incidents one can get out of the simplest subject if one has patience to think it over! What colour one can give them if one is eloquent! And you cannot be a dramatic poet without being eloquent. And do you suppose I shan't have a fine stage effect? The sheriff's interrogatory, for instance, will be given with all the pomp of circumstance. No, leave the staging to me, and so an end to this digression.

I take thee to witness, Roscius of England, celebrated Garrick; thee, who by the unanimous consent of all existing nations art held for the greatest actor they have known! Now render homage to truth. Hast thou not told me that, despite thy depth of feeling, thy action would be weak if, whatever passion or character thou hadst to render, thou couldst not raise thyself by the power of thought to the grandeur of a Homeric shape with which thou soughtest to identify thyself? When I replied that it was not then from thine own type thou didst play, confess thine answer. Didst not avow avoiding this with care, and say that thy playing was astounding only because thou didst constantly exhibit a creature of the imagination which was not thyself?

The Second. A great actor's soul is formed of the subtle element with which a certain philosopher filled space, an element neither cold nor hot, heavy nor light, which affects no definite shape, and, capable of assuming all, keeps none.

The First. A great actor is neither a pianoforte, nor a harp, nor a spinnet, nor a violin, nor a violoncello; he has no key peculiar to him; he takes the key and the tone fit for his part of the score, and he can take up any. I put a high value on the talent of a great actor; he is a rare being — as rare as, and perhaps greater than, a poet.

He who in society makes it his object, and unluckily has the skill, to please every one, is nothing, has nothing that belongs to him, nothing to distinguish him, to delight some and weary others. He is always talking, and always talking well; he is an adulator by profession, he is a great courtier, he is a great actor.

The Second. A great courtier, accustomed since he first drew breath to play the part of a most ingenious puppet, takes every kind of shape at the pull of the string in his master's hands.

The First. A great actor is also a most ingenious puppet, and his strings are held by the poet, who at each line indicates the true form he must take.

The Second. So then a courtier, an actor, who can take only one form, however beautiful, however attractive it may be, are a couple of wretched pasteboard figures?

The First. I have no thought of calumniating a profession I like and esteem — I mean, the actor's. I should be in despair if a misunderstanding of my observations cast a shade of contempt on men of a rare talent and a true usefulness, on the scourges of absurdity and vice, on the most eloquent preachers of honesty and virtue, on the rod which the man of genius wields to chastise knaves and fools. But look around you, and you will see that people of never-failing gaiety have neither great faults nor great merits; that as a rule people who lay themselves out to be agreeable are frivolous people, without any sound principle; and that those who, like certain persons who mix in our society, have no character, excel in playing all.

Has not the actor a father, a mother, a wife, children, brothers, sisters, acquaintances, friends, a mistress? If he were endowed with that exquisite sensibility which people regard as the thing principally needed for his profession, harassed and struck like us with an infinity of troubles in quick succession, which sometimes wither and sometimes tear our hearts, how many days would he have left to devote to our amusement? Mighty few. The Groom of the Chambers would vainly interpose his sovereignty, the actor's state would often make him answer, 'My lord, I cannot laugh today,' or, 'It is over cares other than Agamemnon's that I would weep.' It is not known, however, that the troubles of life, common to actors as to us, and far more opposed to the free exercise of their calling, often interrupt them.

In society, unless they are buffoons, I find them polished, caustic, and cold; proud, light of behaviour, spendthrifts, self-interested; struck rather by our absurdities than touched by our misfortunes; masters of themselves at the spectacle of an untoward incident or the recital of a pathetic story; isolated, vagabonds, at the command of the great; little conduct, no friends, scarce any of those holy and tender ties which associate us in the pains and pleasures of another, who in turn shares our own. I have often seen an actor laugh off the stage; I do not remember to have ever seen one weep. What do they, then, with this sensibility that they arrogate and that people grant them? Do they leave it on the stage at their exit, to take it up again at their next entrance?

What makes them slip on the sock or the buskin? Want of education, poverty, a libertine spirit. The stage is a resource, never a choice. Never did actor become so from love of virtue, from desire to be useful in the world, or to serve his country or family; never from any of the honourable motives which might incline a right mind, a feeling heart, a sensitive soul, to so fine a profession.

I myself, in my young days, hesitated between the Sorbonne and the stage. In the bitterest depth of winter I used to go and recite aloud parts in Molière and in Corneille in the solitary alleys of the Luxembourg. What was my project? To gain applause? Perhaps. To mix on intimate terms with actresses whom I found charming, and who I knew were not straitlaced? Certainly. I know not what I would not have done to please Gaussin, who was then making her first appearance, and was beauty itself; or Dangeville, who on the stage was so full of charm.

It has been said that actors have no character, because in playing all characters they lose that which Nature gave them, and they become false just as the doctor, the surgeon, and the butcher, become hardened. I fancy that here cause is confounded with effect, and that they are fit to play all characters because they have none.

The Second. A person does not become cruel because he is an executioner; but an executioner because he is cruel.

The First. It is all very well for me to look into these persons' characters; I see nothing in them to distinguish them from their fellow-citizens except a vanity which might be termed insolence, a jealousy which fills their company with trouble and hatred. Perhaps of all associations there is not one where the associates' common interest and that of the public is more constantly and more clearly sacrificed to wretched little pretensions. Envy is worse among them than among authors: this is saying a good deal, but it is true. One poet more easily forgives another the success of a piece than one actress forgives another the applause which marks her out for some illustrious or rich debauchee. You find them great on the stage because, as you say, they have soul; I find them little and mean in society because they have none: with the words and the tone of Camille or the elder Horace they have ever the conduct of Frosine or Sganarelle. Now, to estimate what is at

the bottom of their hearts, must I rely on the borrowed reports that are so admirably tricked out, or on the nature of actors and the tenor of their life?

The Second. But of old Molière, the Quinaults, Montmesnil, and to-day Brisart and Caillot, who is equally at home in great and little company, to whose keeping you would fearlessly confide your secrets and your purse, to whom you would trust your wife's honour and your daughters innocence, with much more security than you would to this or that great gentleman of the Court or this or that venerated priest of our altar...

The First. The praise is not overcharged. What annoys me is, that I do not hear you cite a greater number of actors who deserve or have deserved it. What annoys me is, that among all these possessors *ex-officio* of one quality, which is the valuable and fruitful source of so many others, an actor who is a man of honour, an actress who is a woman of virtue, are such rare phenomena.

Let us conclude from this that it is untrue that they have an exclusive claim to this quality, and that the sensibility which would overcome them in private life as on the stage, if they were endowed with it, is neither the basis of their character nor the cause of their success; that it belongs to them neither more nor less than to any other class of people; and one sees so few great actors because parents do not bring up their children for the stage; because people do not prepare for it by an education begun in youth; and a company of actors is not — as it would have to be among a people who attached the due importance, honour, and recompense to the function of speaking to assembled multitudes who come to be taught, amused, and corrected — a corporation formed like other commonwealths, of persons chosen from every kind of good family, and led to the stage as to the services, the law, or the church, by taste or choice, and with the approval of their natural guardians.

The Second. The degradation of modern actors is, it seems to me, an unlucky heritage from the old actors.

The First. I think so.

The Second. If plays had been invented in these days, when people have more sensible notions, perhaps... But you are not listening: what are you thinking of?

The First. I am following up my first idea, and thinking of the influence plays might have on good taste and morals if players were people of position and their profession an honoured one. Where is the poet would dare propose to men of birth to publicly repeat coarse or stupid speeches? — to women, of character not much lighter than the women we know, to impudently utter before a quantity of listeners such things as they would blush to hear in private at their fireside? If the conditions were altered our playwriters would soon attain to a purity, a delicacy, a grace, that they are further from than perhaps they think. Can you doubt that it would re-act upon the national tone?

The Second. One might perhaps object that the pieces, old and new, which your well-behaved players would exclude from their repertory, are the very ones we play in private theatricals.

The First. And what difference does it make if our fellow-citizens lower themselves to the level of the most wretched players? Would it be the less useful, the less desirable, that our actors should raise themselves to the level of the best citizens?

The Second. The change is not easy.

The First. When I gave the *Père de Famille*, the magistrate of police exhorted me to follow the career.

The Second. Why did you not?

The First. Because, not having achieved the success which I had promised myself with it, and not flattering myself that I could do much

better, I grew disgusted with a calling for which I thought I had not enough talent.

The Second. And why did this piece, which nowadays fills the house before half-past four, and which the players always put up when they want a thousand crowns, have so lukewarm a welcome at first?

The First. Some said that our habits were too factitious to suit themselves to a style so simple; too corrupt to taste a style so virtuous.

The Second. That was not without a show of truth.

The First. But experience has shown that it was not true, for we have grown no better. Besides, the true, the honest has such an ascendency over us, that if a poet's work includes two characters in this kind, and if he has genius, his success will be only the more assured. It is, above all, when all is false that we love the true; it is, above all, when all is corrupt that the stage becomes purest. The citizen who presents himself at the door of a theatre leaves his vices there, and only takes them up again as he goes out. There he is just, impartial, a good friend, a lover of virtue; and I have often seen by my side bad fellows deeply indignant at actions which they would not have failed to commit had they found themselves in the same circumstances in which the poet had placed the personage they abhorred. If I did not succeed at first it was because the style was new to audience and actors; because there was a strong prejudice, still existing, against what people call tearful comedy; because I had a crowd of enemies at court, in town, among magistrates, among Churchmen, among men of letters.

The Second. And how did you incur so much enmity?

The First. Upon my word I don't know, for I have not written satires on great or small, and I have crossed no man on the path of fortune and dignities. It is true that I was one of the people called Philosophers, who were then viewed as dangerous citizens, and on whom the Government let

loose two or three wretched subalterns without virtue, without insight, and, what is worse, without talent. But enough of that.

The Second. To say nothing of the fact that these philosophers had made things more difficult for poets and men of letters in general, it was no longer possible to make oneself distinguished by knowing how to turn out a madrigal or a nasty couplet.

The First. That may be. A young rake, instead of sedulously haunting the studio of the painter, the sculptor, the artist who has adopted him, has wasted the best years of his life, and at twenty he has no resources and no talent. What is he to become? A soldier or an actor. You find him, then, enrolled in a country company. He strolls it until he can promise himself an appearance in the capital. An unhappy creature has wallowed in gutter debauchery; tired of the most abject of conditions, that of a low courtesan, she learns a few parts by heart; she goes one morning to Clairon, as the slave of old used to go to the aedile or the praetor. Clairon takes her by the hand, makes her turn round, touches her with her wand, and says to her, 'Go and make the gaping crowd laugh or cry.'

They are excommunicated. The public, which cannot do without them, despises them. They are slaves, constantly dreading the rod of another slave. Think you that the marks of so continual a degradation can fail to have effect, and that under the burden of shame the soul can be strong enough to reach the heights of Corneille?

The despotism that people practise to them they practise in turn to authors, and I know not which is the meaner, the insolent actor or the author who endures him.

The Second. People like to have their plays acted.

The First. On whatever condition. Give your money at the door, and they will weary of your presence and your applause. Well enough off with the

small boxes, they have been on the point of deciding either that the author should give up his profits or that his piece should not be accepted.

The Second. But this project involved nothing less than the extinction of the dramatic author's career.

The First. What does that matter to them?

The Second. You have, I think, but little more to say.

The First. You are mistaken. I must now take you by the hand and lead you to the presence of Clairon, that incomparable enchantress.

The Second. She, at least, was proud of her calling.

The First. As will be all who excel in it. The stage is despised by those actors only who have been hissed off the boards. I must show you Clairon in the real transports of anger. If in them she happened to preserve the bearing, the accent, the action of the stage, with all its artifice and emphasis, would you not hold your sides? could you contain your laughter? What, then, would you tell me? Do you not roundly assert that true sensibility and assumed sensibility are two very different things? You laugh at what you would have admired on the stage; and why, pray? The fact is, that Clairon's real anger resembles simulated anger, and you are able to distinguish between the personality and the passion which that personality assumes. The likeness of passion on the stage is not then its true likeness; it is but extravagant portraiture, caricature on a grand scale, subject to conventional rules. Well, interrogate yourself, ask yourself what artist will confine himself most strictly within the limits of these rules? What kind of actor will most successfully lay hold on this regulated bombast — the man dominated by his own character, or the man born without character, or the man who strips himself of his own to put on another greater, more noble, more fiery, more elevated? One is one's self by nature; one becomes some one else by imitation; the heart one is supposed to have is not the heart one has. What, then, is the true talent? That of knowing well the outward

symptoms of the soul we borrow, of addressing ourselves to the sensations of those who hear and see us, of deceiving them by the imitation of these symptoms, by an imitation which aggrandises everything in their imagination, and which becomes the measure of their judgment; for it is impossible otherwise to appreciate that which passes inside us. And after all, what does it matter to us whether they feel or do not feel, so long as we know nothing about it?

He, then, who best knows and best renders, after the best conceived ideal type, these outward signs, is the greatest actor.

The Second. He, then, who leaves least to the imagination of the great actor is the greatest poet.

The First. I was just going to say so. When by long stage habit one keeps a stage accent in private life, and brings into it Brutus, Cinna, Mithridates, Cornelius, Merope, Pompey, do you know what he does? He couples with a soul small or great, exactly as Nature has cut its measure, the outward signs of an exalted and gigantic soul that is not his own. The result of this is ridicule.

The Second. What a cruel satire is this, innocent or of malice prepense, on actors and authors!

The First. How so?

The Second. Any one, I imagine, may have a great and strong soul; any one, I imagine, may have the bearing, the manner, the action, appropriate to his soul; and I do not think that the expression of true grandeur can ever be ridiculous.

The First. What follows then?

The Second. Ah, you rogue! you dare not say it, and I shall have to incur the general indignation on your behalf. It follows that true tragedy is yet to seek, and that, with all their faults, the ancients came nearer to it than we do.

The First. It is true that it delights me to hear Philoctetes say with such simple strength to Neoptolemus, who brings him back the arrows of Hercules, which he stole at Ulysses's instigation, 'See what a deed you had done! Without knowing it, you had condemned an unhappy wretch to perish of grief and hunger. Your crime is another's, your repentance your own. No; never would you have thought of doing a deed so shameful had you been left to yourself. See then, my child, how important is it for your time of life to keep only honest company. This is what you got by associating with a rascal. And why have aught to do with a man of this character? Would your father have chosen him for your companion and friend? Your good father, who never let any but the first men in the army come near him, what would he say if he saw you with a Ulysses?'

Is there anything in this discourse which you might not address to my son, or I to yours?

The Second. No.

The First. Yet it is finely said.

The Second. Certainly, *The First.* And would the tone in which this discourse would be given on the stage differ from the tone in which one would give it in society?

The Second. I do not think so.

The First. And would this tone be ridiculous in private life?

The Second. Not at all.

The First. The stronger the action, the simpler the language, the more I admire it. I am much afraid that for a hundred years on end we have taken the rodomontade of Madrid for the heroism of Rome, and mixed up the tone of the Tragic with that of the Epic Muse.

The Second. Our Alexandrine verse is too harmonious, and is too noble for dialogue.

The First. And our verse of ten syllables too futile and too light. However this may be, I would like you never to go to a performance of one of Corneille's Roman pieces, but when you are fresh from reading Cicero's letters to Atticus. How bombastic our dramatic authors seem to me, how repulsive are their declamations, when I recall the simplicity and strength of Regulus's discourse dissuading the Senate and the Roman people from an exchange of prisoners! Thus he expresses himself in an ode, a poem which includes a good deal more of fire, spirit, and exaltation, than a tragic monologue, — He says: —

'I have seen our ensigns hanging in the temples of Carthage. I have seen Roman soldiers stripped of their arms, unstained with one drop of blood. I have seen liberty forgotten, citizens with their arms bound behind their backs. I have seen the town gates wide open, and the harvest thick on the fields we ravaged. And you think that, brought back, they will return braver. You add loss to shame. Virtue once driven from a degraded soul never returns. Hope nothing from him who might have died and has let himself be strangled. O Carthage, how great and proud thou art in our shame!'

Such was his discourse, such his conduct. He refuses the embraces of his wife and children; he feels himself unworthy of them, like a vile slave. He keeps his eyes moodily fixed on the ground, and scorns the tears of his friends until he has brought the senators to a determination he alone could have proposed, and until he is allowed to go back to his exile.

The Second. That is simple and splendid, but the really heroic moment was afterwards.

The First. You are right.

The Second. He knew well the torture the savage foe was preparing for him. However, recovering his serenity, he disengages himself from his kinsmen, who seek to put off his return, as easily as in former times he

disengaged himself from the crowd of his clients to go and shake off the fatigue of business in his fields at Venafrum or his campaign at Tarentum.

The First. Very good. Now lay your hand on your heart and tell me if our poets contain many passages of a tone proper for so grand yet so domestic a virtue, and how from such lips as Regulus's would sound either our tender jérémiades or most of our brave words in Corneille's manner. How many things do I not dare to confide to you! I should be stoned in the streets were I known to be guilty of such blasphemy; and I am not anxious for any kind of a martyr's crown. If the day comes when a man of genius dare give his characters the simple tone of antique heroism, the actor's art will assume a new difficulty, for declamation will cease to be a kind of sing-song.

For the rest, in saying that sensibility was the mark of a good heart and a middling genius I made no common confession; for if Nature ever moulded a sensitive soul that soul is mine. The man of sensibility is too much at the mercy of his diaphragm to be a great king, a great politician, a great magistrate, a just man, or a close observer, and, consequently, an admirable imitator of Nature — unless, indeed, he can forget himself, distract himself from himself, and, with the aid of a strong imagination, make for himself certain shapes which serve him for types, and on which he keeps his attention fixed, with the aid of a tenacious memory. Only then it is not his own self that is concerned; it is another's mind and will that master him.

Here I should stop; but you will more readily forgive me the misplacing than the omission of an observation. This phenomenon must surely sometimes have struck you. A budding actor, or let us say a budding actress, asks you to come and see her quietly to form an opinion of her talent. You grant that she has soul, sensibility, passion. You cover her with praises, and leave her when you depart in hope of the greatest success. But what happens? She appears, she is hissed, and you acknowledge that the hisses are deserved. Why is this? Has she lost her soul, her sensibility, her

passion, between the morning and the evening? No; but in her ground-floor room you were both on the same low level; you listened to her regardless *of* convention; she was face-to-face with you; between you there was no model for purposes of comparison; you were satisfied with her voice, her gesture, her expression, her bearing; all was in proportion to the audience and the space; there was nothing that called for exaltation. On the boards all the conditions were changed: there a different impersonation was needed, since all the surroundings were enlarged.

In private theatricals, in a drawing-room, where the spectator is almost on a level with the actor, the true dramatic impersonation would have struck you as being on an enormous, a gigantic scale, and at the end of the performance you would have said confidentially to a friend, 'She will not succeed; she is too extravagant'; and her success on the stage would have astonished you. Le*t* me repeat it, whether for good or ill, the actor says nothing and docs nothing in private life in the same way as on the stage: it is a different world.

But there is a decisive fact, which was told me by an accurate person of an original and attractive turn of mind, the Abbé Galiani, and which I have since heard confirmed by another accurate person, also of an original and attractive turn of mind, the Marquis de Caraccioli, ambassador of Naples at Paris. This is, that at Naples, the native place of both, there is a dramatic poet whose chief care is not given to composing his piece.

The Second. Yours, the *Père de Famille*, had a great success there.

The First. Four representations running were given before the King. This was contrary to court etiquette, which lays down that there shall be as many plays as days of performance. The people were delighted. However, the Neapolitan poet's care is to find in society persons of the age, face, voice, and character fitted to fill his parts. People dare not refuse him, because the Sovereign's amusement is concerned. And when, think you, do the

company begin really to act, to understand each other, to advance towards the point of perfection he demands? It is when the actors are worn out with constant rehearsals, are what we call ‘used up.’ From this moment their progress is surprising; each identifies himself with his part; and it is at the end of this hard work that the performances begin and go on for six months on end, while the Sovereign and his subjects enjoy the highest pleasure that can be obtained from a stage illusion. And can this illusion, as strong, as perfect at the last as at the first performance, be due in your opinion to sensibility? For the rest, the question I am diving into was once before started between a middling man of letters, Rémond de Sainte-Albine, and a great actor, Riccoboni. The man of letters pleaded the cause of sensibility; the actor took up my case. The story is one which has only just come to my knowledge.

I have spoken, you have heard me, and now I ask you what you think of it.

The Second. I think that that arrogant, decided, dry, hard little man, to whom one would attribute a large allowance of contemptuousness if he had only a quarter as much as prodigal Nature has given him of self-sufficiency, would have been a little more reserved in his judgment if you had had the condescension to put your arguments before him and he the patience to listen to you. Unluckily he knows everything, and as a man of universal genius he thinks himself absolved from listening.

The First. Well, the public pays him out for it. Do you know Madame Riccoboni?

The Second. Who does not know the author of a great number of charming works, full of intelligence, of purity, of delicacy, and grace?

The First. Would you call her a woman of sensibility?

The Second. She has proved it, not only by her works, but by her conduct. There was an incident in her life which led her to the brink of the

tomb. After an interval of twenty years she has not ceased to weep; the source of her tears is not yet dry.

The First. Well, this woman, one of the most sensitive that Nature ever made, was one of the worst actresses that ever appeared on the stage. No one talks better on dramatic art; no one plays worse.

The Second. Let me add that she is aware of it, and that she has never complained of being unjustly hissed.

The First. And why with this exquisite sensibility, which, according to you, is the actor's chief requirement, is Mme. Riccoboni so bad?

The Second. It must be that other requirements fail her to such an extent that the chief one cannot make up for their absence.

The First. But she is not ill-looking; she has her wits about her; she has a tolerable bearing; her voice has nothing discordant about it. She possesses all the good qualities that education can give. In society there is no repellent point about her. You see her with no feeling of pain; you listen to her with the greatest pleasure.

The Second. I don't understand it at all; all I know is, that the public has never been able to make up its quarrel with her, and that for twenty years on end she has been the victim of her calling.

The First. And of her sensibility, out of which she could never raise herself; and it is because she has always remained herself that the public has consistently rejected her.

The Second. Now come, do you not know Caillot?

The First. Very well.

The Second. Have you ever talked with him of this?

The First. No.

The Second. In your place I should be glad to have his opinion.

The First. I have it.

The Second. What is it?

The First. Your own and your friend's.

The Second. There is a tremendous authority against you.

The First. I admit it.

The Second. And how did you know Caillot's opinion?

The First. Through a woman full of intellect and keenness, the Princess de Galitzin. Caillot was playing the Deserter, and was still on the spot where he had just gone through the agonies which she, close by, had shared, of an unhappy man resigned to lose his mistress and his life. Caillot draws near the Princess's box, and with the smile you know on his face makes some lively, well-bred, and courteous remarks. The Princess, astonished, says to him, 'What! You are not dead? I, who was only a spectator of your anguish, have only just come to myself.' 'No, Madam, I am not dead. My lot would be indeed pitiable if I died so often.' 'Then you feel nothing?' 'Ah, pardon me.' And so they engaged in a discussion which ended as this of ours will end — I shall keep to my opinion and you to yours. The Princess could not remember Caillot's arguments, but she had noticed that this great imitator of Nature at the very moment of his agony, when he was on the point of being dragged to execution, seeing that the chair on which he would have to lay down the fainting Louise was badly placed, rearranged it as he cried in a moribund voice, *Louise comes not, and my hour is nigh!*

The Second. I am going to propose a compromise; to keep for the actor's natural sensibility those rare moments in which he forgets himself, in which he no longer sees the play, in which he forgets that he is on a stage, in which he is at Argos, or at Mycenae, in which he is the very character he plays. He weeps...

The First. In proper time?

The Second. Yes. He exclaims...

The First. With proper intonation?

The Second. Yes. He is tormented, indignant, desperate; he presents to my eyes the real image, and conveys to my ears and heart the true accents of the passion which shakes him, so that he carries me away and I forget myself, and it is no longer Brizart or Le Kain, but Agamemnon or Nero that I hear. All other moments of the part I give up to art. I think it is perhaps then with Nature as with the slave who learns to move freely despite his chain. The habit of carrying it takes from it its weight and constraint.

The First. An actor of sensibility may perhaps have in his part one or two of these impulses of illusion; and the finer their effect the more they will be out of keeping with the rest. But tell me, when this happens does not the play cease to give you pleasure and become a cause of suffering?

The Second. Oh, no!

The First. And will not this figment of suffering have a more powerful effect than the every-day and real spectacle of a family in tears around the death-bed of a loved father or an adored mother?

The Second. Oh, no!

The First. Then you and the actor have not so completely forgotten yourselves?

The Second. You have already pushed me hard, and I doubt not you could push me yet harder; but I think I could shake you if you would let me enlist an ally. It is half-past four; they play *Dido*; let us go and see Mademoiselle Raucourt: she can answer you better than I can.

The First. I wish it may be so, but I scarce hope it. Do you think she can do what neither Lecouvreur, nor Duclos, nor Deseine, nor Balincourt, nor Clairon, nor Dumesnil has accomplished? I dare tell you this, that if our young beginner is still far from perfect, it is because she is too much of a novice to avoid feeling; and I predict that if she continues to feel, to remain herself, and to prefer the narrow instinct of nature to the limitless study of art, she will never rise to the height of the actresses I have named. She will

have fine moments, but she will not be fine. It will be with her as with Gaussin and many others, who all their lives have been mannered, weak, and monotonous, only because they have never got out of the narrow limits which their natural sensibility imposed upon them. You are still bent on marshalling Mademoiselle Raucourt against me?

The Second. Certainly.

The First. As we go I will tell you a thing which has a close enough connexion with the subject of our talk. I knew Pigalle; his house was open to me. One morning I go there; I knock; the artist opens the door with his roughing-chisel in his hand; then stopping me on the threshold of the studio he says, 'Before I let you pass, assure me you will not be alarmed at a beautiful woman without a rag of clothes on.' I smiled and walked in. He was working at his monument to Marshal Saxe, and a very handsome model was standing to him for the figure of France. But how do you suppose she struck me among the colossal figures around her? She seemed poor, small, mean — a kind of frog; she was overwhelmed by them, and I should have had to take the artist's word for it that the frog was a beautiful woman, if I had not waited for the end of the sitting and seen her on the same level with myself, my back turned to the gigantic figures which reduced her to nothingness. I leave it to you to apply this curious experience to Gaussin, to Riccoboni, to all actresses who have been unable to attain to greatness on the stage.

If by some impossible chance an actress were endowed with a sensibility comparable in degree to that which the most finished art can simulate, the stage offers so many different characters for imitation, one leading part brings in so many opposite situations that this rare and tearful creature, incapable of playing two different parts well, would at best excel in certain passages of one part; she would be the most unequal, the narrowest, the least apt actress you can imagine. If it happened that she attempted a great

flight, her predominant sensibility would soon bring her down to mediocrity. She would be less like a strong steed at the gallop than a poor hack taking the bit in its teeth. Then one instant of energy, momentary, sudden, without gradation or preparation, would strike you as an attack of madness.

Sensibility being after all the mate of Sorrow and Weakness, tell me if a gentle, weak, sensitive creature is fit to conceive and express the self-possession of Léontine, the jealous transports of Hermione, the fury of Camilla, the maternal tenderness of Merope, the delirium and remorse of Phaedra, the tyrannical pride of Agrippina, the violence of Clytemnestra? Leave your ever tearful one to one of our elegiac arts, and do not take her out of it.

The fact is, that to have sensibility is one thing, to feel is another. One is a matter of soul, the other of judgment. One may feel strongly and be unable to express it; one may alone, or in private life, at the fireside, give expression, in reading or acting, adequate for a few listeners, and give none of any account on the stage. On the stage, with what we call sensibility, soul, passion, one may give one or two tirades well and miss the rest. To take in the whole extent of a great part, to arrange its light and shade, its forts and feebles; to maintain an equal merit in the quiet and in the violent passages; to have variety both in harmonious detail and in the broad effect; to establish a system of declamation which shall succeed in carrying off every freak of the poet's — this is matter for a cool head, a profound judgment, an exquisite taste, — a matter for hard work, for long experience, for an uncommon tenacity of memory. The rule, *Qualis ab incepto processent et sibi constet* (Let it continue as it began, harmonious with itself], rigorous enough for the poet, is fixed down to the minutest point for the actor. He who comes out from the wing without having his whole scheme of acting in his head, his whole part marked out, will all his life

play the part of a beginner. Or if endowed with intrepidity, self-sufficiency, and spirit, he relies on his quickness of wit and the habit of his calling, he will bear you down with his fire and the intoxication of his emotions, and you will applaud him as an expert of painting might smile at a free sketch, where all was indicated and nothing marked. This is the kind of prodigy which may be seen sometimes at a fair or at Nicolet's. Perhaps such people do well to remain as they are — mere roughed-out actors. More study would not give them what they want, and might take from them what they have. Take them for what they are worth, but do not compare them to a finished picture.

The Second. I have only one more question to ask you.

The First. Ask it.

The Second. Have you ever seen a whole piece played to perfection?

The First. On my word I can't remember it. Stop a bit — yes, sometimes — a middling piece by middling actors.

Our two talkers went to the playhouse, but as there were no places to be had they turned off to the Tuileries. They walked for some time in silence. They seemed to have forgotten that they were together, and each talked to himself as if he were alone, the one out loud, the other so low that he could not be heard, only at intervals letting out words, isolated but distinct, from which it was easy to guess that he did not hold himself defeated.

The thoughts of the man with the paradox are the only ones of which I can give an account, and here they are, disconnected as they must be when one omits in a soliloquy the intermediate parts which serve to hang it together. He said: Put an actor of sensibility in his place, and see how he will get out of the mess. What did this man do, however? He puts his foot on the balustrade, refastens his garter, and answers the courtier he despises with his head turned on his shoulder; and thus an incident which would

have disconcerted any one but this cold and great actor is suddenly adapted to the surroundings and becomes a trait of genius.

[He spoke, I think, of Baron, in the tragedy of the *Comte d'Essex.* He added with a smile:]

Yes; he will tell you she feels when, her head in her confidante's bosom, almost at the point of death, her eyes turned to the third tier of boxes, she suddenly sees an old Justice, who is dissolved in tears, and whose grief expresses itself in ludicrous grimaces, when she exclaims, 'Look up there! there's a fine face for you!' muttering the words under her breath, like the end of some inarticulate moan. Tell me no such stuff!

If I remember right, this was Gaussin in *Zaire*.

And this third, whose end was so tragic. I knew him; I knew his father, who asked me sometimes to talk to him through his ear-trumpet.

[Here we are evidently dealing with the excellent Montmesnil.]

He was candour and honour itself. What was there in common between his character and that of Tartufe, which he played so well? Nothing. Where did he find the stiff neck, the strange roll of the eyes, the honeyed tone, and all the other fine touches in the hypocrite's part? Take care how you answer; I have you.

In a profound imitation of Nature.

In a profound imitation of Nature?

And you will note that the inward signs which chiefly mark the simplicity of the soul are not so much to be seen in Nature as the outward signs of hypocrisy. You cannot study them there, and an actor of great talent will find more difficulty in seizing on and examining the one than the other. And if I maintained that of all the qualities of the soul sensibility is the easiest to counterfeit, since there is scarce a man alive so cruel, so inhuman, that there is no germ of it in his heart, and that he has never felt it — a thing

which cannot be safely said of all the other passions, such as avarice, distrust? But an excellent instrument...?

Ah, I understand you. Between him who counterfeits sensibility and him who feels there will always be the difference between an imitation and a reality.

And so much the better; so much the better, I tell you. In the first case the actor has no trouble about separating himself from himself; he will arrive at one blow, at one bound, at the height of his ideal type...

At one blow, at one bound!

You are pettifogging over an expression. I mean that, never being brought back to the little type before him, he will be as great, as astonishing, as perfect an imitator of sensibility as of avarice, hypocrisy, duplicity — of every character that is not his own, of every passion that he does not feel. What the person of natural sensibility shows me will be little; the other's imitation will be strong; or, if the copies should be of equal strength, which I by no means grant you, the one, master of himself, playing entirely by study and judgment, will be, as daily experience shows us, more of a piece than the one who plays part from nature, part from study, part from a type, part from himself. However cleverly the two imitations may be fused together, a keen spectator will discriminate between them even more easily than a great artist will discern in a statue the line which marks off either two different styles or a front taken from one model and a back from another.... Let a consummate actor leave off playing from his head, let him forget himself, let his heart be involved, let sensibility possess him, let him give himself up to it...

He will intoxicate us.

Perhaps.

He will transport us with admiration.

It is not impossible; but it will be on condition of not breaking through his system of declamation; of not injuring the unity of the performance; otherwise you will say that he has gone mad. Yes, on this supposition you will, I admit, have a fine moment; but would you rather have a fine moment than a fine part? If that is your choice it is not mine.

Here the man with the paradox was silent. He walked with long strides, not seeing where he went; he would have knocked up against those who met him right and left if they had not got out of his way. Then, suddenly stopping, and catching his antagonist tight by the arm, he said, with a dogmatic and quiet tone, ‘My friend, there are three types — Nature’s man, the poet’s man, the actor’s man. Nature’s is less great than the poet’s, the poet’s less great than the great actor’s, which is the most exalted of all. This last climbs on the shoulders of the one before him and shuts himself up inside a great basket-work figure of which he is the soul. He moves this figure so as to terrify even the poet, who no longer recognises himself; and he terrifies us, as you have very well put it, just as children frighten each other by tucking up their little skirts and putting them over their heads, shaking themselves about, and imitating as best they can the croaking lugubrious accents of the spectre that they counterfeit. Have you not seen engravings of children’s sports?

Have you not observed an urchin coming forward under a hideous old man’s mask, which hides him from head to foot? Behind this mask he laughs at his little companions, who fly in terror before him. This urchin is the true symbol of the actor; his comrades are the symbol of the audience. If the actor has but middling sensibility, and if that is his only merit, will you not call him a middling man? Take care, for this is another trap I am laying for you. And if he is endowed with extreme sensibility what will come of it? — What will come of it? That he will either play no more, or play ludicrously ill; yes, ludicrously; and to prove it you can see the same thing

in me when you like. If I have a recital of some pathos to give, a strange trouble arises in my heart and head; my tongue trips, my voice changes, my ideas wander, my speech hangs fire. I babble; I perceive it; tears course down my cheeks; I am silent. But with this I make an effect — in private life; on the stage I should be hooted.

Why?

Because people come not to see tears, but to hear speeches that draw tears; because this truth of nature is out of tune with the truth of convention. Let me explain myself: I mean that neither the dramatic system, nor the action, nor the poet's speeches, would fit themselves to my stifled, broken, sobbing declamation. You see that it is not allowable to imitate Nature, even at her best, or Truth too closely; there are limits within which we must restrict ourselves.

And who has laid down those limits?

Good sense, which will not play off one talent at the expense of another. The actor must sometimes sacrifice himself to the poet.

But if the poet's composition lent itself to that style?

Then you would have a sort of tragedy very different from what you have here.

And where would be the harm?

I do not know what you would gain, but I know very well what you would lose.

Here the man with the paradox came near his antagonist for the second or third time, and said to him, —

The saying is gross, but it is amusing, and it was said by an actress as to whose talent there are no two opinions. It is a pendant to the speech and situation of Gaussin: she, too, has her head on the breast of Pillot-Pollux; she is dying, at least I think so, and she says to him in a low tone, '*Ah, Pillot, que tu pues!*' ['Oh, Pillot, how you do stink!'] This was Arnould

playing Télaïre. At this moment was Arnould really Télaïre? No; she was Arnould, consistently Arnould. You will never bring me to praise the intermediate degrees of a quality which, if it were carried to its fullest extent, and the actor were mastered by it, would spoil all. But let me suppose that the poet has written a scene to be declaimed on the stage as I should recite it in private life, who would play such a scene? No one: no, no one; not even an actor most completely master of his actions; for once that he came well out of it he would miss it a thousand times. Success, then, hangs on so little! This last argument strikes you as not very cogent? So be it, but not the less shall I deduct from it a little bursting of some bubbles, a lowering of some stilts by a few notches, and the leaving things pretty much as they are. For one poet of genius who attained this prodigious truth to nature there would be a vast number of flat and insipid imitators. It is not allowable, under pain of becoming insipid, awkward, and detestable, to go one line below the simplicity of Nature. Don't you think so?

The Second. I don't think anything. I did not hear what you said.

The First. What? We have not been continuing our dispute?

The Second. No.

The First. Then what the deuce were you doing? And of what were you dreaming?

The Second. That an English actor, called, I think, Macklin (I was at the playhouse that day), having to make his excuses to the pit for his temerity in playing I know not what part in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* after Garrick, said, amongst other things, that the impressions which subjugated actors and submitted them to the poet's genius and inspiration were very hurtful to them. I do not remember the reasons he gave for it, but they were very good, and they were felt and applauded. For the rest, if you are curious about it you will find them in a letter inserted in the *St. James's Chronicle*, over the signature of 'Quintilian.'

The First. So, then, I have been talking all alone all this long time?

The Second. Very likely — just as long as I have been dreaming all alone. You know that of old actors played women's parts?

The First. I know it.

The Second. Aulus Gellius recounts in his *Attic Nights* that a certain Paulus, robed in the lugubrious trappings of Electra, instead of presenting himself on the stage with the urn of Orestes, appeared holding in his arms the urn containing the ashes of his own son whom he had just lost; and then it was no vain representation, no petty sorrow of the stage: but the house rang with real shrieks and groans.

The First. And you believe that Paulus at this moment spoke on the stage as he would have spoken at his fireside? No, no. This prodigious effect, as to which I entertain no doubt, depended neither on Euripides's verse nor on the declamation of the actor, but on the spectacle of a desolate father who bathed with his tears the urn holding his own son's ashes. This Paulus was perhaps only a middling actor; no better than that Æsopus of whom Plutarch reports, that, 'playing one day to a full house the part of Atreus, deliberating with himself how he shall avenge himself on his brother Thyestes, there was one of the servants who wished to run suddenly past him, and he (Æsopus) being beside himself with the vehement emotion and the ardour he threw into representing to the life the furious passion of King Atreus, gave him such a blow on the head with the sceptre he held in his hand that he killed him on the spot.' He was a madman, and the tribune ought to have sent him straight off to the Tarpeian rock.

The Second. Probably he did.

The First. I doubt it. The Romans attached so much importance to the life of a great actor, and so little to the life of a slave.

But they say an actor is all the better for being excited, for being angry. I deny it. He is best when he imitates anger. Actors impress the public not

when they are furious, but when they play fury well. In tribunals, in assemblies, everywhere where a man wishes to make himself master of others' minds, he feigns now anger, now fear, now pity, now love, to bring others into these divers states of feeling. What passion itself fails to do, passion well imitated accomplishes.

Do not people talk in society of a man being a great actor? They do not mean by that that he feels, but that he excels in simulating, though he feels nothing — a part much more difficult than that of the actor; for the man of the world has to find dialogue besides, and to fulfil two functions, the poet's and the actor's. The poet on the stage may be more clever than the actor of private life, but is it to be believed that an actor on the stage can be deeper, cleverer in feigning joy, sadness, sensibility, admiration, hate, tenderness, than an old courtier?

But it is late. Let us go sup.

The Biographies



'The House of Enlightenment' museum, dedicated to Diderot, is housed in the Hotel du Breuil de Saint Germain, Langres, Champagne-Ardenne region of France. The house is organised into 10 themed rooms, including a chronology of the Enlightenment, Denis Diderot in Langres and his later life in Paris, Diderot's journey to Russia, Diderot and art criticism, theatre criticism, Diderot and music, the Encyclopedia.



Plaster cast bust of Diderot by Jean-Antoine Houdon, Paris 1780. Original in Bavarian National Museum Munich

Diderot and the Encyclopædists (1886) by John Morley



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John Morley, 1st Viscount Morley of Blackburn (1838-1923) was a British Liberal statesman, writer and newspaper editor.

VOLUME I.

PREFACE.



THE PRESENT WORK closes a series of studies on the literary preparation for the French Revolution. It differs from the companion volumes on Voltaire and Rousseau, in being much more fully descriptive. In the case of those two famous writers, every educated reader knows more or less of their performances. Of Diderot and his circle, such knowledge cannot be taken for granted, and I have therefore thought it best to occupy a considerable space, which I hope that those who do me the honour to read these pages will not find excessive, with what is little more than transcript or analysis. Such a method will at least enable the reader to see what those ideas really were, which the social and economic condition of France on the eve of the convulsion made so welcome to men. The shortcomings of the encyclopædic group are obvious enough. They have lately been emphasised in the ingenious and one-sided exaggerations of that brilliant man of letters, Mr. Taine. The social significance and the positive quality of much of their writing is more easily missed, and this side of their work it has been one of my principal objects, alike in the case of Voltaire, of Rousseau, and of Diderot, to bring into the prominence that it deserves in the history of opinion.

The edition of Diderot's works to which the references are made, is that in twenty volumes by the late Mr. Assézat and Mr. Maurice Tourneux. The only other serious book on Diderot with which I am acquainted is Rosenkranz's valuable *Diderot's Leben*, published in 1866, and abounding in full and patient knowledge. Of the numerous criticisms on Diderot by Raumer, Arndt, Hettner, Damiron, Bersot, and above all by Mr. Carlyle, I need not make more particular mention.

May, 1878.

NOTE.

Since the following pages were printed, an American correspondent writes to me with reference to the dialogue between Franklin and Raynal, mentioned on page 218, Vol. II.:— "I have now before me Volume IV. of the *American Law Journal*, printed at Philadelphia in the year 1813, and at page 458 find in full, 'The Speech of Miss Polly Baker, delivered before a court of judicature in *Connecticut*, where she was prosecuted.'" Raynal, therefore, would have been right if instead of Massachusetts he had said Connecticut; and either Franklin told an untruth, or else Silas Deane.

September, 1878.

CHAPTER I. PRELIMINARY.



THERE WAS A moment in the last century when the Gallican church hoped for a return of internal union and prosperity. This brief era of hope coincided almost exactly with the middle of the century. Voltaire was in exile at Berlin. The author of the Persian Letters and the Spirit of Laws was old and near his end. Rousseau was copying music in a garret. The Encyclopædia was looked for, but only as a literary project of some associated booksellers. The Jansenists, who had been so many in number and so firm in spirit five-and-twenty years earlier, had now sunk to a small minority of the French clergy. The great ecclesiastical body at length offered an unbroken front to its rivals, the great judicial bodies. A patriotic minister was indeed audacious enough to propose a tax upon ecclesiastical property, but the Church fought the battle and won. Troops had just been despatched to hunt and scatter the Protestants of the desert, and bigots exulted in the thought of pastors swinging on gibbets, and heretical congregations fleeing for their lives before the fire of orthodox musketry. The house of Austria had been forced to suffer spoliation at the hands of the infidel Frederick, but all the world was well aware that the haughty and devout Empress-Queen would seize a speedy opportunity of taking a crushing vengeance; France would this time be on the side of righteousness and truth. For the moment a churchman might be pardoned if he thought that superstition, ignorance, abusive privilege, and cruelty were on the eve of the smoothest and most triumphant days that they had known since the Reformation.

We now know how illusory this sanguine anticipation was destined to prove, and how promptly. In little more than forty years after the triumphant enforcement of the odious system of confessional certificates, then the

crowning event of ecclesiastical supremacy, Paris saw the Feast of the Supreme Being, and the adoration of the Goddess of Reason. The Church had scarcely begun to dream before she was rudely and peremptorily awakened. She found herself confronted by the most energetic, hardy, and successful assailants whom the spirit of progress ever inspired. Compared with the new attack, Jansenism was no more than a trifling episode in a family quarrel. Thomists and Molinists became as good as confederates, and Quietism barely seemed a heresy. In every age, even in the very depth of the times of faith, there had arisen disturbers of the intellectual peace. Almost each century after the resettlement of Europe by Charlemagne had procured some individual, or some little group, who had ventured to question this or that article of the ecclesiastical creed, to whom broken glimpses of new truth had come, and who had borne witness against the error or inconsistency or inadequateness of old ways of thinking. The questions which presented themselves to the acuter minds of a hundred years ago, were present to the acuter minds who lived hundreds of years before that. The more deeply we penetrate into the history of opinion, the more strongly are we tempted to believe that in the great matters of speculation no question is altogether new, and hardly any answer is altogether new. But the Church had known how to deal with intellectual insurgents, from Abelard in the twelfth century down to Giordano Bruno and Vanini in the seventeenth. They were isolated; they were for the most part submissive; and if they were not, the arm of the Church was very long and her grasp mortal. And all these meritorious precursors were made weak by one cardinal defect, for which no gifts of intellectual acuteness could compensate. They had the scientific idea, but they lacked the social idea. They could have set opinion right about the efficacy of the syllogism, and the virtue of entities and quiddities. They could have taught Europe earlier than the Church allowed it to learn that the sun does not go round the earth,

and that it is the earth which goes round the sun. But they were wholly unfitted to deal with the prodigious difficulties of moral and social direction. This function, so immeasurably more important than the mere discovery of any number of physical relations, it was the glory of the Church to have discharged for some centuries with as much success as the conditions permitted. We are told indeed by writers ignorant alike of human history and human nature, that only physical science can improve the social condition of man. The common sense of the world always rejects this gross fallacy. The acquiescence for so many centuries in the power of the great directing organisation of Western Europe, notwithstanding its intellectual inadequateness, was the decisive expression of that rejection.

After the middle of the last century the insurrection against the pretensions of the Church and against the doctrines of Christianity was marked in one of its most important phases by a new and most significant feature. In this phase it was animated at once by the scientific idea and by the social idea. It was an advance both in knowledge and in moral motive. It rested on a conception which was crude and imperfect enough, but which was still almost, like the great ecclesiastical conception itself, a conception of life as a whole. Morality, positive law, social order, economics, the nature and limits of human knowledge, the constitution of the physical universe, had one by one disengaged themselves from theological explanations. The final philosophical movement of the century in France, which was represented by Diderot, now tended to a new social synthesis resting on a purely positive basis. If this movement had only added to its other contents the historic idea, its destination would have been effectually reached. As it was, its leaders surveyed the entire field with as much accuracy and with as wide a range as their instruments allowed, and they scattered over the world a set of ideas which at once entered into energetic rivalry with the ancient

scheme of authority. The great symbol of this new comprehensiveness in the insurrection was the Encyclopædia.

The Encyclopædia was virtually a protest against the old organisation, no less than against the old doctrine. Broadly stated, the great central moral of it all was this: that human nature is good, that the world is capable of being made a desirable abiding-place, and that the evil of the world is the fruit of bad education and bad institutions. This cheerful doctrine now strikes on the ear as a commonplace and a truism. A hundred years ago in France it was a wonderful gospel, and the beginning of a new dispensation. It was the great counter-principle to asceticism in life and morals, to formalism in art, to absolutism in the social ordering, to obscurantism in thought. Every social improvement since has been the outcome of that doctrine in one form or another. The conviction that the character and lot of man are indefinitely modifiable for good, was the indispensable antecedent to any general and energetic endeavour to modify the conditions that surround him. The omnipotence of early instruction, of laws, of the method of social order, over the infinitely plastic impulses of the human creature — this was the maxim which brought men of such widely different temperament and leanings to the common enterprise. Everybody can see what wide and deep-reaching bearings such a doctrine possessed; how it raised all the questions connected with psychology and the formation of character; how it went down to the very foundation of morals; into what fresh and unwelcome sunlight it brought the articles of the old theology; with what new importance it clothed all the relations of real knowledge and the practical arts; what intense interest it lent to every detail of economics and legislation and government.

The deadly chagrin with which churchmen saw the encyclopedic fabric rising was very natural. The teaching of the Church paints man as fallen and depraved. The new secular knowledge clashed at a thousand points, alike in

letter and in spirit, with the old sacred lore. Even where it did not clash, its vitality of interest and attraction drove the older lore into neglected shade. To stir men's vivid curiosity and hope about the earth was to make their care much less absorbing about the kingdom of heaven. To awaken in them the spirit of social improvement was ruin to the most scandalous and crying social abuse then existing. The old spiritual power had lost its instinct, once so keen and effective, of wise direction. Instead of being the guide and corrector of the organs of the temporal power, it was the worst of their accomplices. The Encyclopædia was an informal, transitory, and provisional organisation of the new spiritual power. The school of which it was the great expounder achieved a supreme control over opinion by the only title to which control belongs: a more penetrating eye for social exigencies and for the means of satisfying them.

Our veteran humorist told us long ago in his whimsical way that the importance of the Acts of the French Philosophes recorded in whole acres of typography is fast exhausting itself, that the famed Encyclopædical Tree has borne no fruit, and that Diderot the great has contracted into Diderot the easily measurable. The humoristic method is a potent instrument for working such contractions and expansions at will. The greatest of men are measurable enough, if you choose to set up a standard that is half transcendental and half cynical. A saner and more patient criticism measures the conspicuous figures of the past differently. It seeks their relations to the great forward movements of the world, and asks to what quarter of the heavens their faces were set, whether towards the east where the new light dawns, or towards the west after the old light has sunk irrevocably down. Above all, a saner criticism bids us remember that pioneers in the progressive way are rare, their lives rude and sorely tried, and their services to mankind beyond price. "Diderot is Diderot," wrote one greater than Carlyle: "a peculiar individuality; whoever holds him or his

doings cheaply is a Philistine, and the name of them is legion. Men know neither from God, nor from Nature, nor from their fellows, how to receive with gratitude what is valuable beyond appraisement" (*Goethe*). An intense Philistinism underlay the great spiritual reaction that followed the Revolution, and not even such of its apostles as Wordsworth and Carlyle wholly escaped the taint.

Forty years ago, when Carlyle wrote, it might really seem to a prejudiced observer as if the encyclopædic tree had borne no fruit. Even then, and even when the critic happened to be a devotee of the sterile transcendentalism then in vogue, one might have expected some recognition of the fact that the seed of all the great improvements bestowed on France by the Revolution, in spite of the woful evils which followed in its train, had been sown by the Encyclopædists. But now that the last vapours of the transcendental reaction are clearing away, we see that the movement initiated by the Encyclopædia is again in full progress. Materialistic solutions in the science of man, humanitarian ends in legislation, naturalism in art, active faith in the improvableness of institutions — all these are once more the marks of speculation and the guiding ideas of practical energy. The philosophical parenthesis is at an end. The interruption of eighty years counts for no more than the twinkling of an eye in the history of the transformation of the basis of thought. And the interruption has for the present come to a close. Europe again sees the old enemies face to face; the Church, and a Social Philosophy slowly labouring to build her foundations in positive science. It cannot be other than interesting to examine the aims, the instruments, and the degree of success of those who a century ago saw most comprehensively how profound and far-reaching a metamorphosis awaited the thought of the Western world. We shall do this most properly in connection with Diderot.

Whether we accept or question Comte's strong description of Diderot as the greatest genius of the eighteenth century, it is at least undeniable that he was the one member of the great party of illumination with a real title to the name of thinker. Voltaire and Rousseau were the heads of two important schools, and each of them set deep and unmistakable marks both on the opinion and the events of the century. It would not be difficult to show that their influence was wider than that of the philosopher who discerned the inadequateness of both. But Rousseau was moved by passion and sentiment; Voltaire was only the master of a brilliant and penetrating rationalism. Diderot alone of this famous trio had in his mind the idea of scientific method; alone showed any feeling for a doctrine, and for large organic and constructive conceptions. He had the rare faculty of true philosophic meditation. Though immeasurably inferior both to Voltaire and Rousseau in gifts of literary expression, he was as far their superior in breadth and reality of artistic principle. He was the originator of a natural, realistic, and sympathetic school of literary criticism. He aspired to impose new forms upon the drama. Both in imaginative creation and in criticism, his work was a constant appeal from the artificial conventions of the classic schools to the actualities of common life. The same spirit united with the tendency of his philosophy to place him among the very few men who have been great and genuine observers of human nature and human existence. So singular and widely active a genius may well interest us, even apart from the important place that he holds in the history of literature and opinion.

CHAPTER II. YOUTH.



DENIS DIDEROT WAS born at Langres in 1713, being thus a few months younger than Rousseau (1712), nearly twenty years younger than Voltaire (1694), nearly two years younger than Hume (1711), and eleven years older than Kant (1724). His stock was ancient and of good repute. The family had been engaged in the great local industry, the manufacture of cutlery, for no less than two centuries in direct line. Diderot liked to dwell on the historic prowess of his town, from the days of Julius Cæsar and the old Lingones and Sabinus, down to the time of the Great Monarch. With the taste of his generation for tracing moral qualities to a climatic source, he explained a certain vivacity and mobility in the people of his district by the great frequency and violence of its atmospheric changes from hot to cold, from calm to storm, from rain to sunshine. “Thus they learn from earliest infancy to turn to every wind. The man of Langres has a head on his shoulders like the weathercock at the top of the church spire. It is never fixed at one point; if it returns to the point it has left, it is not to stop there. With an amazing rapidity in their movements, their desires, their plans, their fancies, their ideas, they are cumbrous in speech. For myself, I belong to my country side.” This was thoroughly true. He inherited all the versatility of his compatriots, all their swift impetuosity, and something of their want of dexterity in expression.

His father was one of the bravest, most upright, most patient, most sensible of men. Diderot never ceased to regret that the old man’s portrait had not been taken with his apron on, his spectacles pushed up, and a hand on the grinder’s wheel. After his death, none of his neighbours could speak of him to his son without tears in their eyes. Diderot, wild and irregular as were his earlier days, had always a true affection for his father. “One of the

sweetest moments of my life," he once said, "was more than thirty years ago, and I remember it as if it were yesterday, when my father saw me coming home from school, my arms laden with the prizes I had carried off, and my shoulders burdened with the wreaths they had given me, which were too big for my brow and had slipped over my head. As soon as he caught sight of me some way off, he threw down his work, hurried to the door to meet me, and fell a-weeping. It is a fine sight — a grave and sterling man melted to tears."[1] Of his mother we know less. He had a sister, who seems to have possessed the rough material of his own qualities. He describes her as "lively, active, cheerful, decided, prompt to take offence, slow to come round again, without much care for present or future, never willing to be imposed on by people or circumstance; free in her ways, still more free in her talk; she is a sort of Diogenes in petticoats.... She is the most original and the most strongly-marked creature I know; she is goodness itself, but with a peculiar physiognomy."[2] His only brother showed some of the same native stuff, but of thinner and sourer quality. He became an abbé and a saint, peevish, umbrageous, and as excessively devout as his more famous brother was excessively the opposite. "He would have been a good friend and a good brother," wrote Diderot, "if religion had not bidden him trample under foot such poor weaknesses as these. He is a good Christian, who proves to me every minute of the day how much better it would be to be a good man. He shows that what they call evangelical perfection is only the mischievous art of stifling nature, which would most likely have spoken as lustily in him as in me."[3]

Diderot, like so many others of the eighteenth-century reformers, was a pupil of the Jesuits. An ardent, impetuous, over-genial temperament was the cause of frequent irregularities in conduct. But his quick and active understanding overcame all obstacles. His teachers, ever wisely on the alert for superior capacity, hoped to enlist his talents in the Order. Either they or

he planned his escape from home, but his father got to hear of it. “My grandfather,” says Diderot’s daughter, “kept the profoundest silence, but as he went off to bed took with him the keys of the yard door.” When he heard his son going downstairs, he presented himself before him, and asked whither he was bound at twelve o’clock at night. “To Paris,” replied the youth, “where I am to join the Jesuits.” “That will not be to-night; but your wishes shall be fulfilled. First let us have our sleep.” The next morning his father took two places in the coach, and carried him to Paris to the Collége d’Harcourt. He made all the arrangements, and wished his son good-bye. But the good man loved the boy too dearly to leave him without being quite at ease how he would fare; he had the patience to remain a whole fortnight, killing the time and half dead of weariness in an inn, without ever seeing the one object of his stay. At the end of the fortnight he went to the college, and Diderot used many a time to say that such a mark of tenderness and goodness would have made him go to the other end of the world if his father had required it. “My friend,” said his father, “I am come to see if you are well, if you are satisfied with your superiors, with your food, with your companions, and with yourself. If you are not well or not happy, we will go back together to your mother. If you had rather stay where you are, I am come to give you a word, to embrace you, and to leave you my blessing.” The boy declared he was perfectly happy; and the principal pronounced him an excellent scholar, though already promising to be a troublesome one.[4]

After a couple of years the young Diderot, like other sons of Adam, had to think of earning his bread. The usual struggle followed between youthful genius and old prudence. His father, who was a man of substance, gave him his choice between medicine and law. Law he refused because he did not choose to spend his days in doing other people’s business; and medicine, because he had no turn for killing. His father resolutely declined to let him have more money on these terms, and Diderot was thrown on his wits.

The man of letters shortly before the middle of the century was as much an outcast and a beggar in Paris as he was in London. Voltaire, Gray, and Richardson were perhaps the only three conspicuous writers of the time, who had never known what it was to want a meal or to go without a shirt. But then none of the three depended on his pen for his livelihood. Every other man of that day whose writings have delighted and instructed the world since, had begun his career, and more than one of them continued and ended it, as a drudge and a vagabond. Fielding and Collins, Goldsmith and Johnson, in England; Goldoni in Italy; Vauvenargues, Marmontel, Rousseau, in France; Winckelmann and Lessing in Germany, had all alike been doubtful of dinner, and trembled about a night's lodging. They all knew the life of mean hazard, sorry shift, and petty expedient again and again renewed. It is sorrowful to think how many of the compositions of that time that do most to soothe and elevate some of the best hours of our lives, were written by men with aching hearts, in the midst of haggard perplexities. The man of letters, as distinguished alike from the old-fashioned scholar and the systematic thinker, now first became a distinctly marked type. Macaulay has contrasted the misery of the Grub Street hack of Johnson's time, with the honours accorded to men like Prior and Addison at an earlier date, and the solid sums paid by booksellers to the authors of our own day. But these brilliant passages hardly go lower than the surface of the great change. Its significance lay quite apart from the prices paid for books. The all-important fact about the men of letters in France was that they constituted a new order, that their rise signified the transfer of the spiritual power from ecclesiastical hands, and that, while they were the organs of a new function, they associated it with a new substitute for doctrine. These men were not only the pupils of the Jesuits; they were also their immediate successors as the teachers, the guides, and the directors of society. For two hundred years the followers of Ignatius had taken the intellectual and moral

control of Catholic communities out of the failing hands of the Popes and the secular clergy. Their own hour had now struck. The rationalistic historian has seldom done justice to the services which this great Order rendered to European civilisation. The immorality of many of their maxims, their too frequent connivance at political wrong for the sake of power, their inflexible malice against opponents, and the cupidity and obstructiveness of the years of their decrepitude, have blinded us to the many meritorious pages of the Jesuit chronicle. Even men like Diderot and Voltaire, whose lives were for years made bitter by Jesuit machinations, gave many signs that they recognised the aid which had been rendered by their old masters to the cultivation and enlightenment of Europe. It was from the Jesuit fathers that the men of letters whom they trained, acquired that practical and social habit of mind which made the world and its daily interests so real to them. It was perhaps also his Jesuit preceptors whom the man of letters had to blame for a certain want of rigour and exactitude on the side of morality.

What was this new order which thus struggled into existence, which so speedily made itself felt, and at length so completely succeeded in seizing the lapsed inheritance of the old spiritual organisation? Who is this man of letters? A satirist may easily describe him in epigrams of cheap irony; the pedant of the colleges may see in him a frivolous and shallow profaner of the mysteries of learning; the intellectual coxcomb who nurses his own dainty wits in critical sterility, despises him as Sir Piercie Shafton would have despised Lord Lindsay of the Byres. This notwithstanding, the man of letters has his work to do in the critical period of social transition. He is to be distinguished from the great systematic thinker, as well as from the great imaginative creator. He is borne on the wings neither of a broad philosophic conception nor of a lofty poetic conception. He is only the propagator of portions of such a conception, and of the minor ideas which they suggest. Unlike the Jesuit father whom he replaced, he has no organic doctrine, no

historic tradition, no effective discipline, and no definite, comprehensive, far-reaching, concentrated aim. The characteristic of his activity is dispersiveness. Its distinction is to popularise such detached ideas as society is in a condition to assimilate; to interest men in these ideas by dressing them up in varied forms of the literary art; to guide men through them by judging, empirically and unconnectedly, each case of conduct, of policy, or of new opinion as it arises. We have no wish to exalt the office. On the contrary, I accept the maxim of that deep observer who warned us that "the mania for isolation is the plague of the human throng, and to be strong we must march together. You only obtain anything by developing the spirit of discipline among men."[5]

But there are ages of criticism when discipline is impossible, and the evils of isolation are less than the evils of rash and premature organisation. Fontenelle was the first and in some respects the greatest type of this important class. He was sceptical, learned, ingenious, eloquent. He stretched hands (1657-1757) from the famous quarrel between Ancients and Moderns down to the Encyclopædia, and from Bossuet and Corneille down to Jean Jacques and Diderot. When he was born, the man of letters did not exist. When he died, the man of letters was the most conspicuous personage in France. But when Diderot first began to roam about the streets of Paris, this enormous change was not yet complete.

For some ten years (1734-1744) Diderot's history is the old tale of hardship and chance; of fine constancy and excellent faith, not wholly free from an occasional stroke of rascality. For a time he earned a little money by teaching. If the pupil happened to be quick and docile, he grudged no labour, and was content with any fee or none. If the pupil happened to be dull, Diderot never came again, and preferred going supperless to bed. His employers paid him as they chose, in shirts, in a chair or a table, in books, in money, and sometimes they never paid him at all. The prodigious

exuberance of his nature inspired him with a sovereign indifference to material details. From the beginning he belonged to those to whom it comes by nature to count life more than meat, and the body than raiment. The outward things of existence were to him really outward. They never vexed or absorbed his days and nights, nor overcame his vigorous constitutional instinct for the true proportions of external circumstance. He was of the humour of the old philosopher who, when he heard that all his worldly goods had been lost in a shipwreck, only made for answer, *Jubet me fortuna expeditius philosophari*. Once he had the good hap to be appointed tutor to the sons of a man of wealth. He performed his duties zealously, he was well housed and well fed, and he gave the fullest satisfaction to his employer. At the end of three months the mechanical toil had grown unbearable to him. The father of his pupils offered him any terms if he would remain. “Look at me, sir,” replied the tutor; “my face is as yellow as a lemon. I am making men of your children, but each day I am becoming a child with them. I am a thousand times too rich and too comfortable in your house; leave it I must. What I want is not to live better, but to avoid dying.” Again he plunged from comfort into the life of the garret. If he met any old friend from Langres, he borrowed, and the honest father repaid the loan. His mother’s savings were brought to him by a faithful creature who had long served in their house, and who now more than once trudged all the way from home on this errand, and added her own humble earnings to the little stock. Many a time the hours went very slowly for the necessitous man. One Shrove Tuesday he rose in the morning, and found his pockets empty even of so much as a halfpenny. His friends had not invited him to join their squalid Bohemian revels. Hunger and thoughts of old Shrovetide merriment and feasting in the far-off home made work impossible. He hastened out of doors and walked about all day visiting such public sights as were open to the penniless. When he returned to his garret at night, his landlady found

him in a swoon, and with the compassion of a good soul she forced him to share her supper. “That day,” Diderot used to tell his children in later years, “I promised myself that if ever happier times should come, and ever I should have anything, I would never refuse help to any living creature, nor ever condemn him to the misery of such a day as that.”[6] And the real interest of the story lies in the fact that no oath was ever more faithfully kept. There is no greater test of the essential richness of a man’s nature than that this squalid adversity, not of the sentimental introspective kind but hard and grinding, and not even kept in countenance by respectability, fails to make him a savage or a miser or a misanthrope.

Diderot had his bitter moments. He knew the gloom and despondency that have their inevitable hour in every solitary and unordered life. But the fits did not last. They left no sour sediment, and this is the sign of health in temperament, provided it be not due to mere callousness. From that horrible quality Diderot assuredly was the furthest removed of any one of his time. Now and always he walked with a certain large carelessness of spirit. He measured life with a roving and liberal eye. Circumstance and conventions, the words under which men hide things, the oracles of common acceptance, the infinitely diversified properties of human character, the many complexities of our conduct and destiny — all these he watched playing freely around him, and he felt no haste to compress his experience into maxims and system. He was absolutely uncramped by any of the formal mannerisms of the spirit. He was wholly uncorrupted by the affectation of culture with which the great Goethe infected part of the world a generation later. His own life was never made the centre of the world. Self-development and self-idealisation as ends in themselves would have struck Diderot as effeminate drolleries. The daily and hourly interrogation of experience for the sake of building up the fabric of his own character in this wise or that, would have been incomprehensible and a little odious to him in

theory, and impossible as a matter of practice. In the midst of all the hardships of his younger time, as afterwards in the midst of crushing Herculean taskwork, he was saved from moral ruin by the inexhaustible geniality and expansiveness of his affections. Nor did he narrow their play by looking only to the external forms of human relation. To Diderot it came easily to act on a principle which most of us only accept in words: he looked not to what people said, nor even to what they did, but wholly to what they were.

Those whom he had once found reason to love and esteem might do him many an ill turn, without any fear of estranging him. Any one can measure character by conduct. It is a harder thing to be willing, in cases that touch our own interests, to interpret conduct by previous knowledge of character. His father, for instance, might easily have spared money enough to save him from the harassing privations of Bohemian life in Paris. A less full-blooded and generous person than Diderot would have resented the stoutness of the old man's persistency. Diderot on the contrary felt and delighted to feel, that this conflict of wills was a mere accident which left undisturbed the reality of old love. "The first few years of my life in Paris," he once told an acquaintance, "had been rather irregular; my behaviour was enough to irritate my father, without there being any need to make it worse by exaggeration. Still calumny was not wanting. People told him — well what did they not tell him? An opportunity for going to see him presented itself. I did not give it two thoughts. I set out full of confidence in his goodness. I thought that he would see me, that I should throw myself into his arms, that we should both of us shed tears, and that all would be forgotten. I thought rightly."[7] We may be sure of a stoutness of native stuff in any stock where so much tenacity united with such fine confidence on one side, and such generous love on the other. It is a commonplace how much waste would be avoided in human life if men would more freely

allow their vision to pierce in this way through the distorting veils of egoism, to the reality of sentiment and motive and relationship.

Throughout his life Diderot was blessed with that divine gift of pity, which one that has it could hardly be willing to barter for the understanding of an Aristotle. Nor was it of the sentimental type proper for fine ladies. One of his friends had an aversion for women with child. "What monstrous sentiment!" Diderot wrote; "for my part, that condition has always touched me. I cannot see a woman of the common people so, without a tender commiseration."[8] And Diderot had delicacy and respect in his pity. He tells a story in one of his letters of a poor woman who had suffered some wrong from a priest; she had not money enough to resort to law, until a friend of Diderot took her part. The suit was gained; but when the moment came for execution, the priest had vanished with all his goods. The woman came to thank her protector, and to regret the loss he had suffered. "As she chatted, she pulled a shabby snuff-box out of her pocket, and gathered up with the tip of her finger what little snuff remained at the bottom: her benefactor says to her 'Ah, ah! you have no more snuff; give me your box, and I will fill it.' He took the box and put into it a couple of louis, which he covered up with snuff. Now there's an action thoroughly to my taste, and to yours too! Give, but, if you can, spare to the poor the shame of holding out a hand."[9] And the important thing, as we have said, is that Diderot was as good as his sentiment. Unlike most of the fine talkers of that day, to him these homely and considerate emotions were the most real part of life. Nobody in the world was ever more eager to give succour to others, nor more careless of his own ease.

One singular story of Diderot's heedlessness about himself has often been told before, but we shall be none the worse in an egoistic world for hearing it told again. There came to him one morning a young man, bringing a manuscript in his hand. He begged Diderot to do him the favour

of reading it, and to make any remarks he might think useful on the margin. Diderot found it to be a bitter satire upon his own person and writings. On the young man's return, Diderot asked him his grounds for making such an attack. "I am without bread," the satirist answered, "and I hoped you might perhaps give me a few crowns not to print it." Diderot at once forgot everything in pity for the starving scribbler. "I will tell you a way of making more than that by it. The brother of the Duke of Orleans is one of the pious, and he hates me. Dedicate your satire to him, get it bound with his arms on the cover; take it to him some fine morning, and you will certainly get assistance from him." "But I don't know the prince, and the dedicatory epistle embarrasses me." "Sit down," said Diderot, "and I will write one for you." The dedication was written, the author carried it to the prince, and received a handsome fee.[10]

Marmontel assures us that never was Diderot seen to such advantage as when an author consulted him about a work. "You should have seen him," he says, "take hold of the subject, pierce to the bottom of it, and at a single glance discover of what riches and of what beauty it was susceptible. If he saw that the author missed the right track, instead of listening to the reading, he at once worked up in his head all that the author had left crude and imperfect. Was it a play, he threw new scenes into it, new incidents, new strokes of character; and thinking that he had actually heard all that he had dreamed, he extolled to the skies the work that had just been read to him, and in which, when it saw the light, we found hardly anything that he had quoted from it.... He who was one of the most enlightened men of the century, was also one of the most amiable; and in everything that touched moral goodness, when he spoke of it freely, I cannot express the charm of his eloquence. His whole soul was in his eyes and on his lips; never did a countenance better depict the goodness of the heart."[11] Morellet is equally loud in praise, not only of Diderot's conversation, its brilliance, its vivacity,

its fertility, its suggestiveness, its sincerity, but also his facility and indulgence to all who sought him, and of the sympathetic readiness with which he gave the very best of himself to others.[12]

It is needless to say that such a temper was constantly abused. Three-fourths of Diderot's life were reckoned by his family to have been given up to people who had need of his purse, his knowledge, or his good offices. His daughter compares his library to a shop crowded by a succession of customers, but the customers took whatever wares they sought, not by purchase, but by way of free gift. Luckily for Diderot, he was thus generous by temperament, and not because he expected gratitude. Any necessitous knave with the gift of tears and the mask of sensibility could dupe and prey upon him. In one case he had taken a great deal of trouble for one of these needy and importunate clients; had given him money and advice, and had devoted much time to serve him. At the end of their last interview Diderot escorts his departing friend to the head of the staircase. The grateful client then asks him whether he knows natural history. "Well, not much," Diderot replies; "I know an aloe from a lettuce, and a pigeon from a humming-bird." "Do you know about the *Formica leo?* No? Well, it is a little insect that is wonderfully industrious; it hollows out in the ground a hole shaped like a funnel, it covers the surface with a light fine sand, it attracts other insects, it takes them, it sucks them dry, and then it says to them, 'M. Diderot, I have the honour to wish you good day.'"[13]

Yet insolence and ingratitude made no difference to Diderot. His ear always remained as open to every tale of distress, his sensibility always as quickly touched, his time, money, and service always as profusely bestowed. I know not whether to say that this was made more, or that it was made less, of a virtue by his excess of tolerance for social castaways and reprobates. Our rough mode of branding a man as bad revolted him. The common appetite for constituting ourselves public prosecutors for the

universe, was to him one of the worst of human weaknesses. “You know,” he used to say, “all the impetuosity of the passions; you have weighed all circumstance in your everlasting balance; you pass sentence on the goodness or the badness of creatures; you set up rewards and penalties among matters which have no proportion nor relation with one another. Are you sure that you have never committed wrong acts, for which you pardoned yourselves because their object was so slight, though at bottom they implied more wickedness than a crime prompted by misery or fury? Even magistrates, supported by experience, by the law, by conventions which force them sometimes to give judgment against the testimony of their own conscience, still tremble as they pronounce the doom of the accused. And since when has it been lawful for the same person to be at once judge and informer?”[14]

Such reasoned leniency is the noblest of traits in a man. “I am more affected,” he said, in words of which better men that Diderot might often be reminded, “by the charms of virtue than by the deformity of vice. I turn mildly away from the bad, and I fly to embrace the good. If there is in a work, in a character, in a painting, in a statue, a single fine bit, then on that my eyes fasten; I see only that: that is all I remember; the rest is as good as forgotten.”[15]

This is the secret of a rare and admirable temperament. It carried Diderot well through the trial and ordeal of the ragged apprenticeship of letters. What to other men comes by culture, came to him by inborn force and natural capaciousness. We do not know in what way Diderot trained and nourished his understanding. The annotations to his translation of Shaftesbury, as well as his earliest original pieces, show that he had read Montaigne and Pascal, and not only read but meditated on them with an independent mind. They show also that he had been impressed by the Civitas Dei of Augustine, and had at least dipped into Terence and Horace,

Cicero and Tacitus. His subsequent writings prove that, like the other men of letters of his day, he found in our own literature the chief external stimulant to thought. Above all, he was impressed by the magnificent ideas of the illustrious Bacon, and these ideas were the direct source of the great undertaking of Diderot's life. He is said to have read little and to have meditated much — the right process for the few men of his potent stamp. The work which he had to do for bread was of the kind that crushes anything short of the strongest faculty. He composed sermons. A missionary once ordered half-a-dozen of them for consumption in the Portuguese colonies, and paid him fifty crowns apiece, which Diderot counted far from the worst bargain of his life. All this was beggarly toil for a man of genius, but Diderot never took the trouble to think of himself as a man of genius, and was quite content with life as it came. If he found himself absolutely without food and without pence, he began moodily to think of abandoning his books and his pen, and of complying with the wishes of his father. A line of Homer, an idea from the Principia, an interesting problem in algebra or geometry, was enough to restore the eternally invincible spell of knowledge. And no sooner was this commanding interest touched, than the cloud of uncomfortable circumstance vanished from before the sun, and calm and serenity filled his spirit.

Montesquieu used to declare that he had never known a chagrin which half an hour of a book was not able to dispel. Diderot had the same fortunate temper.

Yet Diderot was not essentially a man of books. He never fell into the characteristic weakness of the follower of letters, by treating books as ends in themselves, or placing literature before life. Character, passion, circumstance, the real tragi-comedy, not its printed shadow and image, engrossed him. He was in this respect more of the temper of Rousseau, than he was like Voltaire or Fontenelle. "Abstraction made," he used to say, "of

my existence and of the happiness of my fellows, what does the rest of nature matter to me?" Yet, as we see, nobody that ever lived was more interested in knowledge. His biographer and disciple remarked the contrast in him between his ardent impetuous disposition and enthusiasm, and his spirit of close unwearied observation. *Faire le bien, connaître le vrai*, was his formula for the perfect life, and defined the only distinction that he cared to recognise between one man and another. And the only motive he ever admitted as reasonable for seeking truth, was as a means of doing good. So strong was his sense of practical life, in the midst of incessant theorising.

At the moment when he had most difficulty in procuring a little bread each day for himself, Diderot conceived a violent passion for a seamstress, Antoinnette Champion by name, who happened to live in his neighbourhood. He instantly became importunate for marriage. The mother long protested with prudent vigour against a young man of such headstrong impetuosity, who did nothing and who had nothing, save the art of making speeches that turned her daughter's head. At length the young man's golden tongue won the mother as it had won the daughter. It was agreed that his wishes should be crowned, if he could procure the consent of his family. Diderot fared eagerly and with a sanguine heart to Langres. His father supposed that he had seen the evil of his ways, and was come at last to continue the honest tradition of their name. When the son disclosed the object of his visit, he was treated as a madman and threatened with malediction. Without a word of remonstrance he started back one day for Paris. Madame Champion warned him that his project must now be for ever at an end. Such unflinching resoluteness is often the last preliminary before surrender. Diderot fell ill. The two women could not bear to think of him lying sick in a room no better than a dog-kennel, without broths and tisanes,

lonely and sorrowful. They hastened to nurse him, and when he got well, what he thought the great object of his life was reached. He and his adored were married (1743).[16] As has been said, "Choice in marriage is a great match of cajolery between purpose and invisible hazard: deep criticism of a game of pure chance is time wasted." In Diderot's case destiny was hostile.

His wife was over thirty. She was dutiful, sage, and pious. She had plenty of that devotion which in small things women so seldom lack. While her husband went to dine out, she remained at home to dine and sup on dry bread, and was pleased to think that the next day she would double the little ordinary for him. Coffee was too dear to be a household luxury, so every day she handed him a few halfpence to have his cup, and to watch the chess-players at the Café de la Régence. When after a year or two she went to make her peace with her father-in-law at Langres, she wound her way round the old man's heart by her affectionate caresses, her respect, her ready industry in the household, her piety, her simplicity. It is, however, unfortunately possible for even the best women to manifest their goodness, their prudence, their devotion, in forms that exasperate. Perhaps it was so here. Diderot at fifty was an orderly and steadfast person, but at thirty the blood of vagabondage was still hot within him. He needed in his companion a robust patience, to match his own too robust activity. One may suppose that if Mirabeau had married Hannah More, the union would have turned out ill, and Diderot's marriage was unluckily of such a type. His wife's narrow pieties and homely solicitudes fretted him. He had not learned to count the cost of deranging the fragile sympathy of the hearth. While his wife was away on her visit to his family, he formed a connection with a woman (Madame Puisieux) who seems to have been as bad and selfish as his wife was the opposite. She was the authoress of some literary pieces, which the world willingly and speedily let die; but even very moderate pretensions to *bel-esprit* may have seemed wonderfully refreshing to a man

wearied to death by the illiterate stupidity of his daily companion.[17] This lasted some three or four years down to 1749. As we shall see, he discovered the infidelity of his mistress and broke with her. But by this time his wife's virtues seem to have gone a little sour, as disregarded prudence and thwarted piety are so apt to do. It was too late now to knit up again the ravelled threads of domestic concord. During a second absence of his wife in Champagne (1754), he formed a new attachment to the daughter of a financier's widow (Mdlle. Voland). This lasted to the end of the lady's days (1783 or 1784).

There is probably nothing very profitable to be said about all this domestic disorder. We do not know enough of the circumstances to be sure of allotting censure in exact and rightful measure. We have to remember that such irregularities were in the manners of the time. To connect them by way of effect with the new opinions in religion, would be as impertinent as to trace the immoralities of Dubois or Lewis the Fifteenth or the Cardinal de Rohan to the old opinions.

CHAPTER III. EARLY WRITINGS.



LA ROCHEFOUCAULD, EXPRESSING a commonplace with the penetrative terseness that made him a master of the apophthegm, pronounced it "not to be enough to have great qualities: a man must have the economy of them." Or, as another writer says: "Empire in this world belongs not so much to wits, to talents, and to industry, as to a certain skilful economy and to the continual management that a man has the art of applying to all his other gifts."[18] Notwithstanding the peril that haunts superlative propositions, we are inclined to say that Diderot is the most striking illustration of this that the history of letters or speculation has to furnish. If there are many who have missed the mark which they or kindly intimates thought them certain of attaining, this is mostly not for want of economy, but for want of the great qualities which were imputed to them by mistake. To be mediocre, to be sterile, to be futile, are the three fatal endings of many superbly announced potentialities. Such an end nearly always comes of exaggerated faculty, rather than of bad administration of natural gifts. In Diderot were splendid talents. It was the art of prudent stewardship that lay beyond his reach. Hence this singular fact, that he perhaps alone in literature has left a name of almost the first eminence, and impressed his greatness upon men of the strongest and most different intelligence, and yet never produced a masterpiece; many a fine page, as Marmontel said, but no one fine work.

No man that ever wrote was more wholly free from that unquiet self-consciousness which too often makes literary genius pitiful or odious in the flesh. He put on no airs of pretended resignation to inferior production, with bursting hints of the vast superiorities that unfriendly circumstance locked up within him. Yet on one occasion, and only on one, so far as evidence remains, he indulged a natural regret. "And so," he wrote when revising the

last sheets of the Encyclopædia (July 25, 1765), "in eight or ten days I shall see the end of an undertaking that has occupied me for twenty years; that has not made my fortune by a long way; that has exposed me many a time to the risk of having to quit my country or lose my freedom; and that has consumed a life that I might have made both more useful and more glorious. The sacrifice of talent to need would be less common, if it were only a question of self. One could easily resolve rather to drink water and eat dry crusts and follow the bidding of one's genius in a garret. But for a woman and for children, what can one not resolve? If I sought to make myself of some account in their eyes, I would not say — I have worked thirty years for you: I would say — I have for you renounced for thirty years the vocation of my nature; I have preferred to renounce my tastes in doing what was useful for you, instead of what was agreeable to myself. That is your real obligation to me, and of that you never think."[19]

It is a question, nevertheless, whether Diderot would have achieved masterpieces, even if the pressure of housekeeping had never driven him to seek bread where he could find it. Indeed it is hardly a question. His genius was spacious and original, but it was too dispersive, too facile of diversion, too little disciplined, for the prolonged effort of combination which is indispensable to the greater constructions whether of philosophy or art. The excellent talent of economy and administration had been denied him; that thrift of faculty, which accumulates store and force for concentrated occasions. He was not encyclopædic by accident, nor merely from external necessity. The quality of rapid movement, impetuous fancy, versatile idea, which he traced to the climate of his birthplace, marked him from the first for an encyclopædic or some such task. His interest was nearly as promptly and vehemently kindled in one subject as in another; he was always boldly tentative, always fresh and vigorous in suggestion, always instant in search. But this multiplicity of active excitements — and with Diderot every

interest rose to the warmth of excitement — was even more hostile to masterpieces than were the exigencies of a livelihood. It was not unpardonable in a moment of exhaustion and chagrin to fancy that he had offered up the treasures of his genius to the dull gods of the hearth. But if he had been childless and unwedded, the result would have been the same. He is the munificent prodigal of letters, always believing his substance inexhaustible, never placing a limit to his fancies nor a bound to his outlay. "It is not they who rob me of my life," he wrote; "it is I who give it to them. And what can I do better than accord a portion of it to him who esteems me enough to solicit such a gift? I shall get no praise for it, 'tis true, either now while I am here, nor when I shall exist no longer; but I shall esteem myself for it, and people will love me all the better for it. 'Tis no bad exchange, that of benevolence, against a celebrity that one does not always win, and that nobody wins without a drawback. I have never once regretted the time that I have given to others; I can scarcely say as much for; the time that I have used for myself."[20] Remembering how uniformly men of letters take themselves somewhat too seriously, we may be sorry that this unique figure among them, who was in other respects constituted to be so considerable and so effective, did not take himself seriously enough.

Apart from his moral inaptitude for the monumental achievements of authorship, Diderot was endowed with the gifts of the talker rather than with those of the writer. Like Dr. Johnson, he was a great converser rather than the author of great books. If we turn to his writings, we are at some loss to understand the secret of his reputation. They are too often declamatory, ill-compacted, broken by frequent apostrophes, ungainly, dislocated, and rambling. He has been described by a consummate judge as the most German of all the French. And his style is deeply marked by that want of feeling for the exquisite, that dulness of edge, that bluntness of stroke, which is the common note of all German literature, save a little of

the very highest. In conversation we do not insist on constant precision of phrase, nor on elaborate sustension of argument. Apostrophe is made natural by the semi-dramatic quality of the situation. Even vehement hyperbole, which is nearly always a disfigurement in written prose, may become impressive or delightful, when it harmonises with the voice, the glance, the gesture of a fervid and exuberant converser. Hence Diderot's personality invested his talk, as happened in the case of Johnson and of Coleridge, with an imposing interest and a power of inspiration which we should never comprehend from the mere perusal of his writings.

His admirers declared his head to be the ideal head of an Aristotle or a Plato. His brow was wide, lofty, open, gently rounded. The arch of the eyebrow was full of delicacy; the nose of masculine beauty; the habitual expression of the eyes kindly and sympathetic, but as he grew heated in talk, they sparkled like fire; the curves of the mouth bespoke an interesting mixture of finesse, grace, and geniality. His bearing was nonchalant enough, but there was naturally in the carriage of his head, especially when he talked with action, much dignity, energy, and nobleness. It seemed as if enthusiasm were the natural condition for his voice, for his spirit, for every feature. He was only truly Diderot when his thoughts had transported him beyond himself. His ideas were stronger than himself; they swept him along without the power either to stay or to guide their movement. "When I recall Diderot," wrote one of his friends, "the immense variety of his ideas, the amazing multiplicity of his knowledge, the rapid flight, the warmth, the impetuous tumult of his imagination, all the charm and all the disorder of his conversation, I venture to liken his character to nature herself, exactly as he used to conceive her — rich, fertile, abounding in germs of every sort, gentle and fierce, simple and majestic, worthy and sublime, but without any dominating principle, without a master and without a God."[21] Grétry, the musical composer, declares that Diderot was one of the rare men who had

the art of blowing the spark of genius into flame; the first impulses stirred by his glowing imagination were of inspiration divine.[22]

Marmontel warns us that he who only knows Diderot in his writings, does not know him at all. We should have listened to his persuasive eloquence, and seen his face aglow with the fire of enthusiasm. It was when he grew animated in talk, and let all the abundance of his ideas flow freely from the source, that he became truly ravishing. In his writings, says Marmontel with obvious truth, he never had the art of forming a whole, and this was because that first process of arranging everything in its place was too slow and too tiresome for him. The want of ensemble vanished in the free and varied course of conversation.[23]

We have to remember then that Diderot was in this respect of the Socratic type, though he was unlike Socrates, in being the disseminator of positive and constructive ideas. His personality exerted a decisive force and influence. In reading the testimony of his friends, we think of the young Aristides saying to Socrates: "I always made progress whenever I was in your neighbourhood, even if I were only in the same house, without being in the same room; but my advancement was greater if I were in the same room with you, and greater still if I could keep my eyes fixed upon you."[24] It has been well said that Diderot, like Socrates, had about him a something dæmonic. He was possessed, and so had the first secret of possessing others. But then to reach excellence in literature, one must also have self-possession; a double current of impulse and deliberation; a free stream of ideas spontaneously obeying a sense or order, harmony, and form. Eloquence in the informal discourse of the parlour or the country walk did not mean in Diderot's case the empty fluency and nugatory emphasis of the ordinary talker of reputation. It must have been both pregnant and copious; declamatory in form, but fresh and substantial in matter; excursive in arrangement, but forcible and pointed in intention. No doubt, if he was a

sage, he was sometimes a sage in a frenzy. He would wind up a peroration by dashing his nightcap passionately against the wall, by way of clencher to the argument. Yet this impetuosity, this turn for declamation, did not hinder his talk from being directly instructive. Younger men of the most various type, from Morellet down to Joubert, men quite competent to detect mere bombast or ardent vagueness, were held captive by the cogency of his understanding. His writings have none of this compulsion. We see the flame, but through a veil of interfused smoke. The expression is not obscure, but it is awkward; not exactly prolix, but heavy, overcharged, and opaque. We miss the vivid precision and the high spirits of Voltaire, the glow and the brooding sonorousness of Rousseau, the pomp of Buffon. To Diderot we go not for charm of style, but for a store of fertile ideas, for some striking studies of human life, and for a vigorous and singular personality.

Diderot's knowledge of our language now did him good service. One of the details of the method by which he taught himself English is curious. Instead of using an Anglo-French dictionary, he always used one in Anglo-Latin. The sense of a Latin or Greek word, he said, is better established, more surely fixed, more definite, less liable to capricious peculiarities of convention, than the vernacular words which the whim or ignorance of the lexicographer may choose. The reader composes his own vocabulary, and gains both correctness and energy.[25] However this may be, his knowledge of English was more accurate than is possessed by most French writers of our own day. Diderot's first work for the booksellers after his marriage seems to have been a translation in three volumes of Stanyan's History of Greece. For this, to the amazement of his wife, he got a hundred crowns. About the same time (1745) he published Principles of Moral Philosophy, or an Essay of Mr. S. on Merit and Virtue. The initial stands for Shaftesbury, and the book translated was his Inquiry concerning Virtue and Merit.

Towards the same time, again, Diderot probably made acquaintance with Madame de Puisieux, of whom it has been said with too patent humour that she was without either the virtue or the merit on which her admirer had just been declaiming. We are told that it was her need of money which inspired him with his first original work. As his daughter's memoir, from which the tale comes, is swarming with blunders, this may not be more true than some of her other statements. All that we know of Diderot's sense and sincerity entitles him to the benefit of the doubt. The Philosophical Thoughts (1746) are a continuation of the vein of the annotations on the Essay. He is said to have thrown these reflections together between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Nor is there anything incredible in such rapid production, when we remember the sweeping impetuosity with which he flung himself into all that he undertook. The Thoughts are evidently the fruits of long meditation, and the literary arrangement of them may well have been an easy task. They are a robuster development of the scepticism which was the less important side of Shaftesbury. The parliament of Paris ordered the book to be burnt along with some others (July 7, 1746), partly because they were heterodox, partly because the practice of publishing books without official leave was gaining an unprecedented height of license.[26] This was Diderot's first experience of that hand of authority, which was for thirty years to surround him with mortification and torment. But the disapproval of authority did not check the circulation or influence of the Thoughts. They were translated into German and Italian, and were honoured by a shower of hostile criticism. In France they were often reprinted, and even in our own day they are said not wholly to have lost their vogue as a short manual of scepticism.[27]

The historians of literature too often write as if a book were the cause or the controlling force of controversies in which it is really only a symbol, or a proclamation of feelings already in men's minds. We should never occupy

ourselves in tracing the thread of a set of opinions, without trying to recognise the movement of living men and concrete circumstance that accompanied and caused the progress of thought. In watching how the beacon-fire flamed from height to height —

φάος δε τηέπομπον ουκ ηναίνετο φρορα, προσαιθρίζουσα πόμπιμονφλόγα —

we should not forget that its source and reference lie in action, in the motion and stirring of confused hosts and multitudes of men. A book, after all, is only the mouthpiece of its author, and the author being human is moved and drawn by the events that occur under his eye. It was not merely because Bacon and Hobbes and Locke had written certain books, that Voltaire and Diderot became free-thinkers and assailed the church. "So long," it has been said, "as a Bossuet, a Fénelon, an Arnauld, a Nicole, were alive, Bayle made few proselytes; the elevation of Dubois and its consequences multiplied unbelievers and indifferents."[28]

The force of speculative literature always hangs on practical opportuneness. The economic evils of monasticism, the increasing flagrancy and grossness of superstition, the aggressive factiousness of the ecclesiastics, the cruelty of bigoted tribunals — these things disgusted and wearied the more enlightened spirits, and the English philosophy only held out an inspiring intellectual alternative.[29]

Nor was it accident that drew Diderot's attention to Shaftesbury, rather than to any other of our writers. That author's essay on Enthusiasm had been suggested by the extravagances of the French prophets, poor fanatics from the Cevennes, who had fled to London after the revocation of the edict of Nantes, and whose paroxysms of religious hysteria at length brought them into trouble with the authorities (1707). Paris saw an outbreak of the same kind of ecstasy, though on a much more formidable scale, among the Jansenist fanatics, from 1727 down to 1758, or later. Some of the best

attested miracles in the whole history of the supernatural were wrought at the tomb of the Jansenist deacon, Paris.[30] The works of faith exalted multitudes into convulsive transports; men and women underwent the most cruel tortures, in the hope of securing a descent upon them of the divine grace. The sober citizen, whose journal is so useful a guide to domestic events in France from the Regency to the Peace of 1763, tells us the effect of this hideous revival upon public sentiment. People began to see, he says, what they were to think of the miracles of antiquity. The more they went into these matters, whether miracles or prophecies, the more obscurity they discovered in the one, the more doubt about the other. Who could tell that they had not been accredited and established in remote times with as little foundation as what was then passing under men's very eyes? Just in the same way, the violent and prolonged debates, the intrigue, the tergiversation, which attended the acceptance of the famous Bull Unigenitus, taught shrewd observers how it is that religions establish themselves. They also taught how little respect is due in our minds and consciences to the great points which the universal church claims to have decided.[31]

These are the circumstances which explain the rude and vigorous scepticism of Diderot's first performances. And they explain the influence of Shaftesbury over him. Neither Diderot nor his contemporaries were ready at once to plunge into the broader and firmer negation to which they afterwards committed themselves. No doubt some of the politeness which he shows to Christianity, both in the notes to his translation of Shaftesbury, and in his own Philosophic Thoughts, is no more than an ironical deference to established prejudices. The notes to the Essay on Merit and Virtue show that Diderot, like all the other French revolters against established prejudice, had been deeply influenced by the shrewd-witted Montaigne. But the ardour of the disciple pressed objections home with a trenchancy that is

very unlike the sage distillations of the master. It was from Shaftesbury, however, that he borrowed common sense as a philosophic principle. Shaftesbury had indirectly drawn it from Locke, and through Hutcheson it became the source and sponsor of the Scottish philosophy of that century. This was a weapon exactly adapted for dealing with a theology that was discredited in the eyes of all cool observers by the hysterical extravagances of one set of religionists, and the factious pretensions of their rivals. And no other weapon was at hand. The historic or critical method of investigation was impossible, for the age did not possess the requisite learning. The indirect attack from the side of physical science was equally impossible. The bearing of Newton's great discovery on the current conceptions of the Creator and the supposed system of the divine government, was not yet fully realised. The other scientific ideas which have since made the old hypothesis less credible, were not at that time even conceived.

Diderot did indeed perceive even so early as this that the controversy was passing from the metaphysicians to the physicists. Though he for the moment misinterpreted the ultimate direction of the effect of experimental discovery, he discerned its potency in the field of theological discussion. "It is not from the hands of the metaphysician," he said, "that atheism has received the weightiest strokes. The sublime meditations of Malebranche and Descartes were less calculated to shake materialism than a single observation of Malpighi's. If this dangerous hypothesis is tottering in our days, it is to experimental physics that such a result is due. It is only in the works of Newton, of Muschenbroek, of Hartzoeker, and of Nieuwentit, that people have found satisfactory proofs of the existence of a being of sovereign intelligence. Thanks to the works of these great men, the world is no longer a god; it is a machine with its cords, its pulleys, its springs, its weights."[32] In other words, Diderot had as yet not made his way beyond the halting-place which has been the favourite goal of English physicists from

Newton down to Faraday.[33] Consistent materialism had not yet established itself in his mind. Meanwhile he laid about him with his common sense, just as Voltaire did, though Diderot has more weightiness of manner. If his use of the weapon cannot be regarded as a decisive settlement of the true issues, we have to remember that he himself became aware in a very short time of its inadequateness, and proceeded to the discussion, as we shall presently see, from another side.

The scope of the Philosophical Thoughts, and the attitude of Diderot's mind when they were written, may be shown in a few brief passages. The opening words point to the significance of the new time in one direction, and they are the key-note to Diderot's whole character. "People are for ever declaiming against the passions; they set down to them all the pains that man endures, and quite forget that they are also the source of all his pleasures. It is regarded as an affront to reason if one dares to say a word in favour of its rivals. Yet it is only passions, and strong passions, that can raise the soul to great things. Sober passions produce only the commonplace. Deadened passions degrade men of extraordinary quality. Constraint annihilates the greatness and energy of nature. See that tree; 'tis to the luxury of its branches that you owe the freshness and the wide-spreading breadth of its shade, which you may enjoy till winter comes to despoil it of its leafy tresses. An end to all excellence in poetry, in painting, in music, as soon as superstition has once wrought upon human temperament the effect of old age! It is the very climax of madness to propose to oneself the ruin of the passions. A fine design truly in your pietist, to torment himself like a convict in order to desire nothing, love nothing, feel nothing; and he would end by becoming a true monster, if he were to succeed!"[34] Many years afterwards he wrote in the same sense to Madame Voland. "I have ever been the apologist of strong passions; they alone move me. Whether they inspire me with admiration or horror, I feel

vehemently. If atrocious deeds that dishonour our nature are due to them, it is by them also that we are borne to the marvellous endeavour that elevates it. The man of mediocre passion lives and dies like the brute." And so forth, until the writer is carried to the perplexing position that "if we were bound to choose between Racine, a bad husband, a bad father, a false friend, and a sublime poet, and Racine, good father, good husband, good friend, and dull worthy man, I hold to the first. Of Racine, the bad man, what remains? Nothing. Of Racine, the man of genius? The work is eternal."[35] Without attempting to solve this problem in casuistry, we recognise Diderot's mood, and the hatred with which it would be sure to inspire him for the starved and mutilated passions of the Christian type. The humility, chastity, obedience, indolent solitude, which had for centuries been glorified by the Church, were monstrous to this vehement and energetic spirit. The church had placed heroism in effacement. Diderot, borne to the other extreme, left out even discipline. To turn from his maxims on the foundation of conduct, to his maxims on opinion. As we have said, his attitude is that of the sceptic: —

What has never been put in question, has not been proved. What people have not examined without prepossessions, they have not examined thoroughly. Scepticism is the touchstone. (§ 31.)

Incredulity is sometimes the vice of a fool, and credulity the defect of a man of intelligence. The latter sees far into the immensity of the Possible; the former scarcely sees anything possible beyond the Actual. Perhaps this is what produces the timidity of the one, and the temerity of the other.

A demi-scepticism is the mark of a feeble understanding. It reveals a pusillanimous reasoner, who suffers himself to be alarmed by consequences; a superstitious creature, who thinks he is honouring God by the fetters which he imposes on his reason; a kind of unbeliever who is afraid of unmasking himself to himself. For if truth has nothing to lose by

examination, as is the demi-sceptic's conviction, what does he think in the bottom of his heart of those privileged notions which he fears to sound, and which are placed in one of the recesses of his brain, as in a sanctuary to which he dares not draw nigh? (§ 34.)

Scepticism does not suit everybody. It supposes profound and impartial examination. He who doubts because he does not know the grounds of credibility, is no better than an ignoramus. The true sceptic has counted and weighed the reasons. But it is no light matter to weigh arguments. Who of us knows their value with any nicety? Every mind has its own telescope. An objection that disappears in your eyes, is a colossus in mine: you find an argument trivial that to me is overwhelming.... If then it is so difficult to weigh reasons, and if there are no questions which have not two sides, and nearly always in equal measure, how come we to decide with such rapidity? (§ 24.)

When the pious cry out against scepticism, it seems to me that they do not understand their own interest, or else that they are inconsistent. If it is certain that a true faith to be embraced, and a false faith to be abandoned, need only to be thoroughly known, then surely it must be highly desirable that universal doubt should spread over the surface of the earth, and that all nations should consent to have the truth of their religions examined. Our missionaries would find a good half of their work done for them. (§ 36.)

One thing to be remembered is that Diderot, like Vauvenargues, Voltaire, Condorcet, always had Pascal in his mind when dealing with apologetics. They all recognised in him a thinker with a love of truth, as distinguished from the mere priest, Catholic, Anglican, Brahman, or another. "Pascal," says Diderot, "was upright, but he was timid and inclined to credulity. An elegant writer and a profound reasoner, he would doubtless have enlightened the world, if Providence had not abandoned him to people who sacrificed his talents to their own antipathies. How much to be regretted,

that he did not leave to the theologians of his time the task of settling their own differences; that he did not give himself up to the search for truth, without reserve and without the fear of offending God by using all the intelligence that God had given him. How much to be regretted that he took for masters men who were not worthy to be his disciples, and was foolish enough to think Arnauld, De Sacy, and Nicole, better men than himself." (§ 14.) The Philosophic Thoughts are designed for an answer in form to the more famous Thoughts of this champion of popular theology. The first of the following extracts, for instance, recalls a memorable illustration of Pascal's sublime pessimism. A few passages will illustrate sufficiently the line of argument which led the foremost men at the opening of the philosophic revolution to reject the pretensions of Christianity: —

What voices! what cries! what groans! Who is it that has shut up in dungeons all these piteous souls? What crimes have the poor wretches committed? Who condemns them to such torments? *The God whom they have offended*. Who then is this God? *A God full of goodness*. But would a God full of goodness take delight in bathing himself in tears? If criminals had to calm the furies of a tyrant, what would they do more?... There are people of whom we ought not to say that they fear God, but that they are horribly afraid of him.... Judging from the picture they paint of the Supreme Being, from his wrath, from the rigour of his vengeance, from certain comparisons expressive of the ratio between those whom he leaves to perish and those to whom he deigns to stretch out a hand, the most upright soul would be tempted to wish that such a being did not exist. (§§ 7-9.)

You present to an unbeliever a volume of writings of which you claim to show him the divinity. But, before going into your proofs, he will be sure to put some questions about your collection. Has it always been the same? Why is it less ample now than it was some centuries ago? By what right have they banished this work or that, which another sect reveres, and

preserved this or that, which the other has repudiated?... You only answer all these difficulties by the avowal that the first foundations of the faith are purely human; that the choice between the manuscripts, the restoration of passages, finally the collection, has been made according to rules of criticism. Well, I do not refuse to concede to the divinity of the sacred books a degree of faith proportioned to the certainty of these rules. (§ 59.)

People agree that it is of the last importance to employ none but solid arguments for the defence of a creed. Yet they would gladly persecute those who attempt to cry down the bad arguments. What then, is it not enough to be a Christian? Am I also to be one upon wrong grounds? (§57.)

The less probability a fact has, the more does the testimony of history lose its weight. I should have no difficulty in believing a single honest man who should tell me that the king had just won a complete victory over the allies. But if all Paris were to assure me that a dead man had come to life again, I should not believe a word of it. That a historian should impose upon us, or that a whole people should be mistaken — there is no miracle in that. (§46.)

What is God? A question that we put to children, and that philosophers have much trouble to answer. We know the age at which a child ought to learn to read, to sing, to dance, to begin Latin or geometry. It is only in religion that you take no account of his capacity. He scarcely hears what you say, before he is asked, What is God? It is at the same instant, from the same lips, that he learns that there are ghosts, goblins, were-wolves — and a God. (§25.)

The diversity of religious opinions has led the deists to invent an argument that is perhaps more singular than sound. Cicero, having to prove that the Romans were the most warlike people in the world, adroitly draws this conclusion from the lips of their rivals. Gauls, to whom if to any, do you yield the palm for courage? To the Romans. Parthians, after you, who

are the bravest of men? The Romans. Africans, whom would you fear, if you were to fear any? The Romans. Let us interrogate the religionists in this fashion, say the deists. Chinese, what religion would be the best, if your own were not the best? Naturalism. Mussulmans, what faith would you embrace, if you abjured Mahomet? Naturalism. Christians, what is the true religion, if it be not Christianity? Judaism. But you, O Jews, what is the true religion, if Judaism be false? Naturalism. Now those, continues Cicero, to whom the second place is awarded by unanimous consent, and who do not in turn concede the first place to any — it is those who incontestably deserve that place. (§62.)

In all this we notice one constant characteristic of the eighteenth century controversy about revealed religion. The assailant demands of the defender an answer to all the intellectual or logical objections that could possibly be raised by one who had never been a Christian, and who refused to become a Christian until these objections could be met. No account is taken of the mental conditions by which a creed is engendered and limited; nor of the train of historic circumstance which prepares men to receive it. The modern apologist escapes by explaining religion; the apologist of a hundred years ago was required to prove it. The end of such a method was inevitably a negation. The objective propositions of a creed with supernatural pretensions can never be demonstrated from natural or rationalistic premisses. And if they could be so demonstrated, it would only be on grounds that are equally good for some other creeds with the same pretensions. The sceptic was left triumphantly weighing one revealed system against another in an equal balance.[36]

The position of the writer of the Philosophical Thoughts is distinctly theistic. Yet there is at least one striking passage to show how forcibly some of the arguments on the other side impressed him. “I open,” says Diderot,

“the pages of a celebrated professor, and I read— ‘Atheists, I concede to you that movement is essential to matter; what conclusion do you draw from that? That the world results from the fortuitous concourse of atoms? You might as well say that Homer’s Iliad, or Voltaire’s Henriade, is a result of the fortuitous concourse of written characters.’ Now for my part, I should be very sorry to use that reasoning to an atheist; the comparison would give him a very easy game to play. According to the laws of the analysis of chances, he would say to me, I ought not to be surprised that a thing comes to pass when it is possible, and the difficulty of the event is compensated by the number of throws. There is a certain number of throws in which I would safely back myself to bring 100,000 sixes at once with 100,000 dice. Whatever the definite number of the letters with which I am invited fortuitously to produce the Iliad, there is a certain definite number of throws which would make the proposal advantageous for me; nay, my advantage would be infinite if the quantity of throws accorded to me were infinite. Now, you grant to me that matter exists from all eternity, and that movement is essential to it. In return for this concession, I will suppose with you that the world has no limits; that the multitude of atoms is infinite, and that this order, which astonishes you, nowhere contradicts itself. Well, from these reciprocal admissions there follows nothing else unless it be this, that the possibility of engendering the universe fortuitously is very small, but that the number of throws is infinite, or in other words, that *the difficulty of the event is more than sufficiently compensated by the multitude of the throws. Therefore, if anything ought to be repugnant to reason, it is the supposition that, — matter being in motion from all eternity, and there being perhaps in the infinite number of possible combinations an infinite number of admirable arrangements, — none of these admirable arrangements would have been met with, out of the infinite multitude of all*

those which matter successively took on. Therefore the mind ought to be more astonished at the hypothetical duration of chaos."[37] (§ 21.)

In a short continuation of the Philosophical Thoughts entitled On the Sufficiency of Natural Religion, Diderot took the next step, and turned towards that faith which the votaries of each creed allow to be the best after their own. Even here he is still in the atmosphere of negation. He desires no more than to show that revealed religion confers no advantages which are not already secured by natural religion. "The revealed law contains no moral precept which I do not find recommended and practised under the law of nature; therefore it has taught us nothing new upon morality. The revealed law has brought us no new truth; for what is a truth but a proposition referring to an object, conceived in terms which present clear ideas to me, and the connection of which with one another is intelligible to me? Now revealed religion has introduced no such propositions to us. What it has added to the natural law consists of five or six propositions which are not a whit more intelligible to me than if they were expressed in ancient Carthaginian, inasmuch as the ideas represented by the terms, and the connection among these ideas, escape me entirely."[38]

There is no sign in this piece that Diderot had examined the positive grounds of natural religion, or that he was ready with any adequate answer to the argument which Butler had brought forward in the previous decade of the century. We do not see that he is aware as yet of there being as valid objections on his own sceptical principles to the alleged data of naturalistic deism, as to the pretensions of a supernatural religion. He was content with Shaftesbury's position.

Shaftesbury's influence on Diderot was permanent. It did not long remain so full and entire as it was now in the sphere of religious belief, but the traces of it never disappeared from his notions on morals and art. Shaftesbury's cheerfulness and geniality in philosophising were thoroughly

sympathetic to Diderot. The optimistic harmony which the English philosopher, coming after Leibnitz, assumed as the starting-point of his ethical and religious ideas, was not only highly congenial to Diderot's sanguine temperament; it was a most attractive way of escape from the disorderly and confused theological wilderness of sin, asceticism, miracle, and the other monkeries. This naturalistic religion may seem a very unsafe and comfortless halting-place to us. But to men who heard of religion only in connection with the Bull Unigenitus and confessional certificates, with some act of intolerance or cruelty, with futile disputes about grace and the Five Propositions, the naturalism which Shaftesbury taught in prose and Pope versified was like the dawn after the foulness of night. Those who wished to soften the inhuman rigour of the criminal procedure of the time[39] used to appeal from customary ordinances and written laws to the law natural. The law natural was announced to have preceded any law of human devising. In the same way, those who wished to disperse the darkness of unintelligible dogmas and degraded ecclesiastical usages, appealed to the simplicity, light, and purity of that natural religion which was supposed to have been overlaid and depraved by the special superstitions of the different communities of the world.

"Pope's Essay on Man," wrote Voltaire after his return from England (1728), "seems to me the finest didactic poem, the most useful, the most sublime, that was ever written in any tongue. 'Tis true the whole substance of it is to be found in Shaftesbury's Characteristics, and I do not know why Pope gives all the honour of it to Bolingbroke, without saying a word of the celebrated Shaftesbury, the pupil of Locke."[40] The ground of this enthusiastic appreciation of the English naturalism was not merely that it made morality independent of religion, which Shaftesbury took great pains to do. It also identified religion with all that is beautiful and harmonious in the universal scheme. It surrounded the new faith with a pure and lofty

poetry, that enabled it to confront the old on more than equal terms of dignity and elevation. Shaftesbury, and Diderot after him, ennobled human nature by placing the principle of virtue, the sense of goodness, within the breast of man. Diderot held to this idea throughout, as we shall see. That he did so explains a kind of phraseology about virtue and morality in his letters to Madame Voland and elsewhere, which would otherwise sound disagreeably like cant. Finally, Shaftesbury's peculiar attribution of beauty to morality, his reference of ethical matters to a kind of taste, the tolerably equal importance attributed by him to a sense of beauty and to the moral sense, all impressed Diderot with a mark that was not effaced. In the text of the Inquiry the author pronounces it a childish affectation in the eyes of any man who weighs things maturely to deny that there is in moral beings, just as in corporeal objects, a true and essential beauty, a real sublime. The eagerness with which Diderot seized on this idea from the first, is shown in the declamatory foot-note which he here appends to his original.[41] It was the source, by a process of inverted application, of that ethical colouring in his criticisms on art which made them so new and so interesting, because it carried æsthetic beyond technicalities, and associated it with the real impulses and circumstances of human life.[42]

One of Diderot's writings composed about our present date (1747), the Promenade du Sceptique, did not see the light until after his death. His daughter tells us that a police agent came one day to the house, and proceeded to search the author's room. He found a manuscript, said, "Good, that is what I am looking for," thrust it into his pocket, and went away. Diderot did his best to recover his piece, but never succeeded.[43] A copy of it came into the hands of Naigeon, and it seems to have been retained by Malesherbes, the director of the press, out of goodwill to the author. If it had been printed, it would certainly have cost him a sojourn in Vincennes.

We have at first some difficulty in realising how he police could know the contents of an obscure author's desk. For one thing we have to remember that Paris, though it had been enormously increased in the days of Law and the System (1719-20), was still of a comparatively manageable size. In 1720, though the population of the whole realm was only fourteen or fifteen millions, that of Paris had reached no less a figure than a million and a half. After the explosion of the System, its artificial expansion naturally came to an end. By the middle of the century the highest estimate of the population does not make it much more than eight hundred thousand.[44] This, unlike the socially unwholesome and monstrous agglomerations of Paris or London in our own time, was a population over which police supervision might be made tolerably effective. It was more like a very large provincial town. Again, the inhabitants were marked off into groups or worlds with a definiteness that is now no longer possible. One-fifth of the population, for instance, consisted of domestic servants.[45] There were between twenty-eight and thirty thousand professional beggars.[46] The legal circle was large, and was deeply engrossed by its own interests and troubles. The world of authorship, though extremely noisy and profoundly important, still made only a small group. One effect of a censorship is to produce much gossip and whispering about suspected productions before they see the light, and these whispers let the police into as many secrets as they choose to know.

In Diderot's case, his unsuspecting good-nature to all comers made his affairs accessible enough. His house was the resort of all the starving hacks in Paris, and he has left us more than one graphic picture of the literary drudge of that time. He writes, for instance, about a poor devil to whom he had given a manuscript to copy. "The time for which he had promised it to me expired, and as my man did not appear, I became uneasy, and started in search of him. I found him in a hole about as big as my fist, almost pitch-

dark, without the smallest scrap of curtain or hanging to cover the nakedness of his walls, a couple of straw-bottomed chairs, a truckle-bed with a quilt riddled by the moths, a box in the corner of the chimney and rags of every sort stuck upon it, a small tin lamp to which a bottle served as support, and on a shelf some dozen first-rate books. I sat talking there for three-quarters of an hour. My man was as bare as a worm, lean, black, dry, but perfectly serene. He said nothing, but munched his crust of bread with good appetite, and bestowed a caress from time to time on his beloved, on the miserable bedstead that took up two-thirds of his room. If I had never learnt before that happiness resides in the soul, my Epictetus of Hyacinth Street would have taught it me right thoroughly."[47]

The history of one of these ragged clients is to our point. "Among those," he wrote to Madame Voland,[48] "whom chance and misery sent to my address was one Glénat, who knew mathematics, wrote a good hand, and was in want of bread. I did all I could to extricate him from his embarrassments. I went begging for customers for him on every side. If he came at meal-times, i would not let him go; if he lacked shoes, I gave him them; now and then I slipped a shilling into his hands as well. he had the air of the worthiest man in the world, and he even bore his neediness with a certain gaiety that used to amuse me. I was fond of chatting with him; he seemed to set little store by fortune, fame, and most of the other things that charm or dazzle us in life. Seven or eight days ago Damilaville wrote to send this man to him, for one of his friends who had a manuscript for him to copy. I send him; the manuscript is entrusted to him — a work on religion and government. i do not know how it came about, but that manuscript is now in the hands of the lieutenant of police. Damilaville gives me word of this. I hasten to my friend Glénat, to warn him to count no more upon me. 'And why am I not to count upon you?' 'Because you are a marked man. The police have their eyes upon you and 'tis impossible to send work to

you.' 'But, my dear sir, there's no risk, so long as you entrust nothing reprehensible to my hands. The police only come here when they scent game. I cannot tell how they do it, but they are never mistaken.' 'Ah well, I at any rate know how it is, and you have let me see much more in the the matter than I ever expected to learn from you,' and with that I turn my back on my rascal." Diderot having occasion to visit the lieutenant of police, introduced the matter, and could not withhold an energetic remonstrance against such an odious abuse of a man's kindness of heart, as the introduction of spies to his fireside. M. de Sartine laughed and Diderot took his leave, vowing that all the wretches who should come to him for the future, with cuffs dirty and torn, with holes in their stockings and holes in their shoes, with hair all unkempt, in shabby overcoats with many rents, or scanty black suits with starting seams, with all the tones and looks of distressed worth, would henceforth seem to him no better than police emissaries and scoundrels set to spy on him. The vow, we may be sure, was soon forgotten, but the story shows how seriously in one respect the man of letters in France was worse off than his brother in England.

The world would have suffered no irreparable loss if the police had thrown the Sceptic's Walk into the fire. It is an allegory designed to contrast the life of religion, the life of philosophy, and the life of sensual pleasure. Of all forms of composition, an allegory most depends for its success upon the rapidity of the writer's eye for new felicities. Accuracy, verisimilitude, sustention, count for nothing in comparison with imaginative adroitness and variety. Bunyan had such an eye, and so, with infinitely more vivacity, had Voltaire. Diderot had not the deep sincerity or realism of conviction of the one; nor had he the inimitable power of throwing himself into a fancy, that was possessed by the other. He was the least agile, the least felicitous, the least ready, of composers. His allegory of the avenue of thorns, the avenue of chestnut-trees, and the avenue of flowers, is an allegory, unskilful,

obvious, poor, and not any more amusing than if it's matter had been set forth without any attempt at fanciful decoration. The blinded saints among the thorns, and the voluptuous sinners among the flowers, are rather mechanical figures. The translation into the dialect required by the allegorical situation, of a sceptic's aversion for gross superstition on the one hand, and for gross hedonism on the other, is forced and wooden. The most interesting of the three sections is the second, containing a discussion in which the respective parts are taken by a deist, a pantheist, a subjective idealist, a sceptic, and an atheist. The allegory falls into the background, and we have a plain statement of some of the objections that may be made by the sceptical atheist both to revelation and to natural religion. A starry sky calls forth the usual glorification of the maker of so much beauty. "That is all imagination," rejoins the atheist. "It is mere presumption. We have before us an unknown machine, on which certain observations have been made. Ignorant people who have only examined a single wheel of it, of which they hardly know more than a tooth or two, form conjectures upon the way in which their cogs fit in with a hundred thousand other wheels. And then to finish like artisans, they label the work with the name of it's author."

The defender justifies this by the argument from a repeater-watch, of which Paley and others have made so much use. We at once ascribe the structure and movement of a repeater-watch to intelligent creation. "No — things are not equal," says the atheist. "You are comparing a finished work, whose origin and manufacture we know, to an infinite piece of complexity, whose beginnings, whose present condition, and whose end are all alike unknown, and about whose author you have nothing better than guesses."

But does not its structure announce an author? "No; you do not see who nor what he is. Who told you that the order you admire here belies itself nowhere else? Are you allowed to conclude from a point in space to infinite

space? You pile a vast piece of ground with earth-heaps thrown here or there by chance, but among which the worm and the ant find convenient dwelling-places enough. What would you think of these insects, if, reasoning after your fashion, they fell into raptures over the intelligence of the gardener who had arranged all these materials so delightfully for their convenience?"[49]

In this rudimentary form the chief speaker presses some of the objections to optimistic deism from the point of view of the fixed limitations, the inevitable relativity, of human knowledge. This kind of objection had been more pithily expressed by Pascal long before, in the famous article of his Thoughts, on the difficulty of demonstrating the existence of a deity by light of nature.[50] Diderot's argument does not extend to dogmatic denial. It only shows that the deist is exposed to an attack from the same sceptical armoury from which he had drawn his own weapons for attacking revelation. It is impossible to tell how far Diderot went at this moment. The trenchancy with which his atheist urges his reasoning, proves that the writer was fully alive to its force. On the other hand, the atheist is left in the midst of a catastrophe. On his return home, he finds his children murdered, his house pillaged, and his wife carried off. And we are told that he could not complain on his own principles.

If the absence of witnesses allowed the robber to commit his crime with impunity, why should he not? Again, there is a passage in which the writer seems to be speaking his own opinions. An interlocutor maintains the importance of keeping the people in bondage to certain prejudices. "What prejudices? If a man once admits the existence of a God, the reality of moral good and evil, the immortality of the soul, future rewards and punishments, what need has he of prejudices? Supposing him initiated in all the mysteries of transubstantiation, consubstantiation, the Trinity,

hypostatical union, predestination, incarnation, and the rest, will he be any the better citizen?"[51]

In truth, Diderot's mind was at this time floating in an atmosphere of rationalistic negation, and the moral of his piece, as he hints, points first to the extravagance of Catholicism, next to the vanity of the pleasures of the world, and lastly, to the unfathomable uncertainty of philosophy. Still, we may discern a significant leaning towards the theory of the eternity of matter, which has arranged itself and assumed variety of form by virtue of its inherent quality of motion.[52]

It is a characteristic and displeasing mark of the time that Diderot in the midst of these serious speculations, should have set himself (1748) to the composition of a story in the kind which the author of the *Sofa* had made highly popular. The mechanism of this deplorable piece is more grossly disgusting — I mean æsthetically, not morally — than anything to be found elsewhere in the too voluminous library of impure literature. The idea would seem to have been borrowed from one of the old Fabliaux.[53] But what is tolerable in the quaint and *naïf* verse of the twelfth or thirteenth century, becomes shocking when deliberately rendered by a grave man into bald unblushing prose of the eighteenth. The humour, the rich sparkle, the wit, the merry *gaillardise*, have all vanished; we are left with the vapid dregs of an obscene anachronism. Mr. Carlyle, who knows how to be manly in these matters, and affects none of the hypocritical airs of our conventional criticism, yet has not more energetically than truly pronounced this "the beastliest of all past, present, or future dull novels." As "the next mortal creature, even a Reviewer, again compelled to glance into that book," I have felt the propriety of our humorist's injunction to such a one, "to bathe himself in running water, put on change of raiment, and be unclean until the even." Diderot himself, as might have been expected, soon

had the grace to repent him of this shameful book, and could never hear it mentioned without a very lively embarrassment.[54]

As I have said before,[55] it was such books as this, as Crébillon's novels, as Duclos's Confessions du Comte

X., and the dissoluteness of manners indicated by them, which invested Rousseau's New Heloïsa (1761) with its delightful and irresistible fascinations. Having pointed out elsewhere the significance of the licentiousness from which the philosophic party did not escape untainted,[56] I need not here do more than make two short remarks. First, the corruption which had seized the court after the death of Lewis XIV. in the course of a few years had reached the middle class in the town. The loosening of social fibre, caused by the insenate speculation at the time of Law, no doubt furthered the spread of demoralisation. Second, the reaction against the Church involved among its other elements a passionate contempt for all asceticism. This happened to fall in with the general relaxation of morals that followed Lewis's gloomy rigour. Consequently even men of pure life, like Condorcet, carried the theoretical protest against asceticism so far as to vindicate the practical immorality of the time. This is one of those enormous drawbacks that people seldom take into account when they are enumerating the blessings of superstition. Mediæval superstition had produced some advantages, but now came the set-off. Durable morality had been associated with a transitory religious faith. The faith fell into intellectual discredit, and sexual morality shared its decline for a short season. This must always be the natural consequence of building sound ethics on the shifting sands and rotting foundations of theology.

Such literature as these tales of Diderot's, was the mirror both of the ordinary practical sentiment and the philosophic theory. A nation pays dearly for one of those outbreaks, when they happen to stamp themselves in a literary form that endures. There are those who hold that Louvet's Faublas

is to this day a powerful agent in the depravation of the youth of France. Diderot, however, had not the most characteristic virtues of French writing; he was no master in the art of the *naïf*, nor in delicate malice, nor in sprightly cynicism. His book, consequently, has not lived, and we need not waste more words upon it. *Chaque esprit a sa lie*, wrote one who for a while had sat at Diderot's feet;[57] and we may dismiss this tale as the lees of Diderot's strong, careless, sensualised understanding. He was afterwards the author of a work, La Religieuse, on which the superficial critic may easily pour out the vials of affected wrath. There, however, he was executing a profound pathological study in a serious spirit. If the subject is horrible, we have to blame the composition of human character, or the mischievousness of a human institution. La Religieuse is no continuation of the vein of defilement which began and ended with the story of 1748 — a story which is one among so many illustrations of Guizot's saying about the eighteenth century, that it was the most tempting and seductive of all centuries, for it promised full satisfaction at once to all the greatnesses of humanity and to all its weaknesses. Hettner quotes a passage from the minor writings of Niebuhr, in which the historian compares Diderot with Petronius, as having both of them been honest and well-intentioned men, who in shameless times were carried towards cynicism by their deep contempt for the prevailing vice. "If Diderot were alive now," says Niebuhr, "and if Petronius had only lived in the fourth instead of the third century, then the painting of obscenity would have been odious to them, and the inducement to it infinitely smaller."[58] There is no trace in Diderot of this deep contempt for the viciousness of his time. All that can be said is that he did not escape it in his earlier years, in spite of the natural wholesomeness and rectitude of his character.

It is worthy of remark that the dissoluteness of the middle portion of the century was not associated with the cynical and contemptuous view about

women that usually goes with relaxed morality. There was a more or less distinct consciousness of a truth which has ever since grown into clearer prominence with the advance of thought since the Revolution. It is that the sphere and destiny of women are among the three or four foremost questions in social improvement. This is now perceived on all sides, profound as are the differences of opinion upon the proper solution of the problem. A hundred years ago this perception was vague and indefinite, but there was an unmistakable apprehension that the Catholic ideal of womanhood was no more adequate to the facts of life, than Catholic views about science, or property, or labour, or political order and authority.

Diderot has left some curious and striking reflections upon the fate and character of women. He gives no signs of feeling after social reorganisation; he only speaks as one brooding in uneasy meditation over a very mournful perplexity. There is no sentimentalising, after the fashion of Jean Jacques. He does not neglect the plain physical facts, about which it is so difficult in an age of morbid reserve to speak with freedom, yet about which it is fatal to be silent. He indulged in none of those mischievous flatteries of women, which satisfy narrow observers, or coxcombs, or the uxorious. “Never forget,” he said, “that for lack of reflection and principles, nothing penetrates down to a certain profoundness of conviction in the understanding of women. The ideas of justice, virtue, vice, goodness, badness, float on the surface of their souls. They have preserved self-love and personal interest with all the energy of nature. Although more civilized than we are outwardly, they have remained true savages inwardly.... It is in the passion of love, the access of jealousy, the transports of maternal tenderness, the instants of superstition, the way in which they show epidemic and popular notions, that women amaze us; fair as the seraphin of Klopstock, terrible as the fiends of Milton.... The distractions of a busy and contentious life break up our passions. A woman, on the contrary, broods

over her passions; they are a fixed point on which her idleness or the frivolity of her duties holds her attention fast.... Impenetrable in dissimulation, cruel in vengeance, tenacious in their designs, without scruples about the means of success, animated by a deep and secret hatred against the despotism of man — it seems as if there were among them a sort of league, such as exists among the priests of all nations.... The symbol of women in general is that of the Apocalypse, on the front of which is inscribed *Mystery*.... If we have more reason than women have, they have far more instinct than we have."[59] All this was said in no bitterness, but in the spirit of the strong observer.

Cynical bitterness is as misplaced as frivolous adulation. Diderot had a deep pity for women. Their physical weaknesses moved him to compassion. To these are added the burden of their maternal function, and the burden of unequal laws. "The moment which shall deliver the girl from subjection to her parents is come; her imagination opens to a future thronged by chimæras; her heart swims in secret delight. Rejoice while thou canst, luckless creature! Time would have weakened the tyranny that thou hast left; time will strengthen the tyranny that awaits thee. They choose a husband for her. She becomes a mother. It is in anguish, at the peril of their lives, at the cost of their charms, often to the damage of their health, that they give birth to their little ones. The organs that mark their sex are subject to two incurable maladies. There is, perhaps, no joy comparable to that of the mother as she looks on her first-born; but the moment is dearly bought. Time advances, beauty passes; there come the years of neglect, of spleen, of weariness. 'Tis in pain that Nature disposes them for maternity; in pain and illness, dangerous and prolonged, she brings maternity to its close. What is a woman after that? Neglected by her husband, left by her children, a nullity in society, then piety becomes her one and last resource. In nearly every part of the world, the cruelty of the civil laws against women is added to the

cruelty of Nature. They have been treated like weak-minded children. There is no sort of vexation which, among civilised peoples, man cannot inflict upon woman with impunity."[60]

The thought went no further, in Diderot's mind, than this pathetic ejaculation. He left it to the next generation, to Condorcet and others, to attack the problem practically; effectively to assert the true theory that we must look to social emancipation in women, and moral discipline in men, to redress the physical disadvantages. Meanwhile Diderot deserves credit for treating the position and character of women in a civilised society with a sense of reality; and for throwing aside those faded gallantries of poetic and literary convention, that screen a broad and dolorous gulf.

CHAPTER IV. THE NEW PHILOSOPHY.



IT IS A common prejudice to treat Voltaire as if he had done nothing save write the Pucelle and mock at Habakkuk. Every serious and instructed student knows better. Voltaire's popularisation of the philosophy of Newton (1738) was a stimulus of the greatest importance to new thought in France. In a chapter of this work he had explained with his usual matchless terseness and lucidity Berkeley's theory of vision. The principle of this theory is, as every one knows, that figures, magnitudes, situations, distances, are not sensations but inferences; they are not the immediate revelations of sight, but the products of association and intellectual construction; they are not directly judged by vision, but by imagination and experience. If this be so, neither situation, nor distance, nor magnitude, nor figure, would be at once discerned by one born blind, supposing him suddenly to receive sight. Voltaire then describes the results of the operation performed by Cheselden (1728) on a lad who had been blind from his birth. This experiment was believed to confirm all that Locke and Berkeley had foreseen, for it was long before the patient could distinguish objects by size, distance, or shape.[61] Condillac had renewed the interest which Voltaire had first kindled in the subject, by referring to Cheselden's experiment in his first work, which was published in 1746.[62]

It happened that in 1748 Réaumur couched the eyes of a girl who had been born blind. Diderot sought to be admitted to the operation, but the favour was denied him, and he expressed his resentment in terms which, as we shall see, cost him very dear. As he could not witness the experiment, he began to meditate upon the subject, and the result was the *Letter on the Blind for the Use of those who See*. published in 1749 — the date, it may be observed in passing, of another very important work in the development of

materialistic speculation, David Hartley's *Observations on man, his frame, his duty, and his expectations*. Diderot's real disappointment at not being admitted to the operation was slight. In a vigorous passage he shows the difficulties in the way of conducting such an experiment under the conditions necessary to make it conclusive. To prepare the born-blind to answer philosophical interrogatories truly, and then to put these interrogatories rightly, would have been a feat, he declares, not unworthy of the united talents of Newton, Descartes, Locke, and Leibnitz. Unless the patient were placed in such conditions as this, Diderot thinks there would be more profit in questioning a blind person of good sense, than in the answers of an uneducated person receiving sight for the first time under abnormal and bewildering circumstances.[63] In this he was undoubtedly right. If the experiment could be prepared under the delicate conditions proper to make it demonstrative evidence, it would be final. But the experiment had certainly not been so prepared in his time, and probably never will be.[64]

Read in the light of the rich and elaborate speculative literature which England is producing in our own day, Diderot's once famous Letter on the Blind seems both crude and loose in its thinking. Yet considering the state of philosophy in France at the time of its appearance, we are struck by the acuteness, the good sense, and the originality of many of its positions. It was the first effective introduction into France of these great and fundamental principles; that all knowledge is relative to our intelligence, that thought is not the measure of existence, nor the conceivableness of a proposition the test of its truth, and that our experience is not the limit to the possibilities of things. That is an impatient criticism which dismisses the French philosophers with some light word as radically shallow and impotent. Diderot grasped the doctrine of Relativity in some of the most important and far-reaching of all its bearings. The fact that he and his allies used the doctrine as a weapon of combat against the standing organisation,

is exactly what makes their history worth writing about. The standing organisation was the antagonistic doctrine incarnate. It made anthropomorphism and the absolute the very base and spring alike of individual and of social life. No growth was possible until this speculative base had been transformed. Hence the profound significance of what looks like a mere discussion of one of the minor problems of metaphysics. Diderot was not the first to discover Relativity, nor did he establish it; but it was he who introduced it into the literature of his country at the moment when circumstances were ripe for it.

Condillac, as we have said, had published his first work, the Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge, three years before (1746). This was a simple and undeveloped rendering of the doctrine of Locke, that the ultimate source of our notions lies in impressions made upon the senses, shaped and combined by reflection. It was not until 1754 that Condillac published his more celebrated treatise on the Sensations, in which he advanced a stride beyond Locke, and instead of tracing our notions to the double source of sensation and reflection, maintained that reflection itself is nothing but sensation "differently transformed." In the first book, again, he had disputed Berkeley's theory of vision: in the second, he gave a reasoned adhesion to it. Now Diderot and Condillac had first been brought together by Rousseau, when all three were needy wanderers about the streets of Paris. They used to dine together once a week at a tavern, and it was Diderot who persuaded a bookseller to give Condillac a hundred crowns for his first manuscript. "The Paris booksellers," says Rousseau, "are very arrogant and harsh to beginners; and metaphysics, then extremely little in fashion, did not offer a very particularly attractive subject."[65] The constant intercourse between Diderot and Condillac in the interval between the two works of the great apostle of Sensationalism, may well account for the remarkable development in doctrine. This is one of the many examples of the share of

Diderot's energetic and stimulating intelligence, in directing and nourishing the movement of the time, its errors and precipitancies included. On the other hand, the share of Condillac in providing a text for Diderot's first considerable performance, is equally evident.

The Letter on the Blind is an inquiry how far a modification of the five senses, such as the congenital absence of one of them, would involve a corresponding modification of the ordinary notions acquired by men who are normally endowed in their capacity for sensation. It considers the Intellect in a case where it is deprived of one of the senses. The writer opens with an account of a visit made by himself and some friends to a man born blind at Puisaux, a place seventy miles from Paris. They asked him in what way he thought of the eyes. "They are an organ on which the air produces the same effect as my stick upon my hand." A mirror he described "as a machine which sets things in relief away from themselves, if they are properly placed in relation to it." This conception had formed itself in his mind in the following way. The blind man only knows objects by touch. He is aware, on the testimony of others, that we know objects by sight as he knows them by touch; he can form no other notion. He is aware, again, that a man cannot see his own face, though he can touch it. Sight, then, he concludes, is a sort of touch, which only extends to objects different from our own visage, and remote from us. Now touch only conveys to him the idea of relief. A mirror, therefore, must be a machine which sets us in relief out of ourselves. How many philosophers, cries Diderot, have employed less subtlety to reach notions just as untrue?

The born-blind had a memory for sound in a surprising degree, and countenances do not present more diversity to us than he observed in voices. The voice has for such persons an infinite number of delicate shades that escape us, because we have not the same reason for attention that the

blind have. The help that our senses lend to one another, is an obstacle to their perfection.

The blind man said he should have been tempted to regard persons endowed with sight as superior intelligences, if he had not found out a hundred times how inferior we are in other respects. How do we know — Diderot reflects upon this — that all the animals do not reason in the same way, and look upon themselves as our equals or superiors, notwithstanding our more complex and efficient intelligence? They may accord to us a reason with which we should still have much need of their instinct while they claim to be endowed with an instinct which enables them to do very well without our reason.

When asked whether he should be glad to have sight, the born-blind replied that, apart from curiosity, he would be just as well pleased to have long arms: his hands would tell him what is going on in the moon, better than our eyes or telescopes; and the eyes cease to see earlier than the hands lose the sense of touch. It would therefore be just as good to perfect in him the organ that he had, as to confer upon him another which he had not. This is untrue. No conceivable perfection of touch would reveal phenomena of light, and the longest arms must leave those phenomena undisclosed.

After recounting various other peculiarities of thought, Diderot notices that the blind man attaches slight importance to the sense of shame. He would hardly understand the utility of clothes, for instance, except as a protection against cold. He frankly told his philosophising visitors that he could not see why one part of the body should be covered rather than another. “I have never doubted,” says Diderot, “that the state of our organs and senses has much influence both on our metaphysics and our morality.” This, I may observe, does not in the least show that in a society of human beings, not blind, but endowed with vision, the sense of physical shame is a mere prejudice of which philosophy will rid us. The fact that a blind man

discerns no ill in nakedness, has no bearing on the value or naturalness of shame among people with eyes. And moreover, the fact that delicacy or shame is not a universal human impulse, but is established, and its scope defined, by a varying etiquette, does not in the least affect the utility or wisdom of such an artificial establishment and definition. The grounds of delicacy, though connected with the senses, are fixed by considerations that spring from the social reason. It seems to be true, as Diderot says, that the born-blind are at first without physical delicacy; because delicacy has its root in the consciousness that we are observed, while the born-blind are not conscious that they are observed. It is found that one of the most important parts of their education is to impress this knowledge upon them.[66]

But the artificiality of a moral acquisition is obviously no test of its worth, nor of the reasons for preserving it. Diderot exclaims, “Ah, madam, how different is the morality of a blind man from ours; and how the morality of the deaf would differ from that of the blind; and if a being should have a sense more than we have, how wofully imperfect would he find our morality!” This is plainly a crude and erroneous way of illustrating the important truth of the strict relativity of ethical standards and maxims. Diderot speaks as if they were relative simply and solely to our five wits, and would vary with them only. Everybody now has learnt that morality depends not merely on the five wits, but on the mental constitution within, and on the social conditions without. It is to these rather than to the number of our senses, that moral ideas are relative.

Passing over various other remarks, we come to those pages in the Letter which apply the principle of relativity to the master-conception of God. Diderot’s argument on this point naturally drew keener attention than the more disinterestedly scientific parts of his contribution. People were not strongly agitated by the question whether a blind man who had learned to

distinguish a sphere from a cube by touch, would instantly identify each of them if he received sight.[67]

The question whether a blind man has as good reasons for believing in the existence of a God as a man with sight can find, was of more vivid interest. As a matter of fact, Diderot's treatment of the narrower question (pp. 324, etc.) is more closely coherent than his treatment of the wider one, for the simple reason that the special limitation of experience in the born-blind cannot fairly be made to yield any decisive evidence on the great, the insoluble enigma.

Here, as in the other part of his essay, Diderot followed the method of interrogating the blind themselves. In this instance, he turned to the most extraordinary example in history, of intellectual mastery and scientific penetration in one who practically belonged to the class of the born-blind; and this too in dealing with subjects where sight might be thought most indispensable. From 1711 to 1739 one of the professors of mathematics at Cambridge was Nicholas Saunderson, who had lost his sight before he was twelve months old. He was a man of striking mental vigour, an original and efficient teacher, and the author of a book upon algebra which was considered meritorious in its day. His knowledge of optics was highly remarkable. He had distinct ideas of perspective, of the projections of the sphere, and of the forms assumed by plane or solid figures in certain positions. For performing computations he devised a machine of great ingenuity, which also served the purpose, with certain modifications, of representing geometrical diagrams. In religion he was a sceptic or something more, and in his last hours Diderot supposes him to have engaged in a discussion with a minister of religion, upon the arguments for the existence of a deity drawn from final causes. This discussion Diderot professes to reproduce, and he makes Saunderson discourse with much eloquence and some pathos.

By one of those mystifications which make the French polemical literature of the eighteenth century the despair of bibliographers, Diderot cites as his authority a *Life of Saunderson*, by Dr. Inchlif. He sets forth the title with great circumstantiality, but no such book exists or ever did exist. The Royal Society of London, however, took the jest of fathering atheism on one of its members in bad part, and Diderot was systematically excluded from the honour of admission to that learned body, as he was excluded all his life from the French Academy.

The reasoning which Diderot puts into the professor's mouth is at first a fervid enlargement of the text, that the argument drawn from the wonders of nature is very weak evidence for blind men. Our power of creating new objects, so to speak, by means of a little mirror, is far more incomprehensible to them, than the stars which they have been condemned never to behold. The luminous ball that moves from east to west through the heavens, is a less astonishing thing to them than the fire on the hearth which they can lessen or augment at pleasure.[68] "Why talk to me," says Saunderson, "of all that fine spectacle which has never been made for me? I have been condemned to pass my life in darkness; and you cite marvels that I cannot understand, and that are only evidence for you and for those who see as you do. If you want me to believe in God, you must make me touch him." The minister replied that the sense of touch ought to be enough to reveal the divinity to him in the admirable mechanism of his organs. To this, Saunderson:— "I repeat, all that is not as fine for me as it is for you. But the animal mechanism, even were it as perfect as you pretend, and as I daresay it is — what has it in common with a Being of sovereign intelligence? If it fills you with astonishment, that is perhaps because you are in the habit of treating as a prodigy anything that strikes you as being beyond your own strength. I have been myself so often an object of admiration for you, that I have a poor opinion of what surprises you. I have attracted people from all

parts of England, who could not conceive by what means I could work at geometry. Well, you must agree that such persons had not very exact notions about the possibility of things. Is a phenomenon in our notions beyond the power of man? Then we instantly say— 'Tis *the handiwork of a God*. Nothing short of that can content our vanity. Why can we not contrive to throw into our talk less pride and more philosophy?. If nature offers us some knot that is hard to untie, let us leave it for what it is; do not let us employ for cutting it the hand of a Being, who then immediately becomes in turn a new knot for us, and a knot harder to untie than the first. An Indian tells you that our globe is suspended in the air on the back of an elephant. And the elephant! It stands on a tortoise. And the tortoise? what sustains that?... You pity the Indian: and yet one might very well say to you as to him — Mr. Holmes, my good friend, confess your ignorance, and spare me elephant and tortoise."[69]

The minister very naturally then falls back upon good authority, and asks Saunderson to take the word of Newton, Clarke, and Leibnitz. The blind man answers that though the actual state of the universe may be the illustration of a marvellous and admirable order, still Newton, Clarke, and Leibnitz must leave him freedom of opinion as to its earlier states. And then he foreshadows in a really singular and remarkable way that theory which is believed to be the great triumph of scientific discovery, and which is certainly the great stimulus to speculation, in our own time. As to anterior states "you have no witnesses to confront with me, and your eyes give you no help. Imagine, if you choose, that the order which strikes you so profoundly has subsisted from the beginning. But leave me free to think that it has done no such thing, and that if we went back to the birth of things and scenes, and perceived matter in motion and chaos slowly disentangling itself, we should come across a whole multitude of shapeless creatures, instead of a very few creatures highly organised. If I have no objection to

make to what you say about the present condition of things, I may at least question you as to their past condition. I may at least ask of you, for example, who told you — you and Leibnitz and Clarke and Newton — that in the first instances of the formation of animals, some were not without heads and others without feet? I may maintain that these had no stomachs, and those no intestines; that some to whom a stomach, a palate, and teeth seemed to promise permanence, came to an end through some fault of heart or lungs; that the monsters annihilated one another in succession, that all the faulty (*vicieuses*) combinations of matter disappeared, and that *those only survived whose mechanism implied no important mis-adaptation* (contradiction), *and who had the power of supporting and perpetuating themselves*.

"On this hypothesis, if the first man had happened to have his larynx closed, or had not found suitable food, or had been defective in the parts of generation, or had failed to find a mate, then what would have become of the human race? It would have been still enfolded in the general depuration of the universe; and that arrogant being who calls himself Man, dissolved and scattered among the molecules of matter, would perhaps have remained for all time hidden in the number of mere possibilities.

"If shapeless creatures had never existed, you would not fail to insist that none will ever appear, and that I am throwing myself headlong into chimerical hypotheses. But the order is not even now so perfect, but that monstrous products appear from time to time."[70]

We have here a distinct enough conception, though in an exceedingly undigested shape, first, of incessant Variability in organisms as an actual circumstance, which we may see exemplified in its extreme form in the monstrous deviations of structure that occur from time to time before our own eyes; second, of Adaptation to environment as the determining condition of Survival among the forms that present themselves. Even as a

bald and unsustained guess, this was an effective side-blow at the doctrine of final causes — a doctrine, as has been often remarked, which does not survive, in any given set of phenomena, the reduction of these phenomena to terms of matter and motion.

"I conjecture then," continues Saunderson, enlarging the idea of the possibilities of matter and motion, "that in the beginning when matter in fermentation gradually brought our universe bursting into being, blind creatures like myself were very common. But why should I not believe of worlds what I believe of animals? How many worlds, mutilated and imperfect, were peradventure dispersed, then re-formed, and are again dispersing at each moment of time in those far-off spaces which I cannot touch and you cannot behold, but where motion combines and will continue to combine masses of matter, until they have chanced on some arrangement in which they may finally persevere! O philosophers, transport yourselves with me on to the confines of the universe, beyond the point where I feel, and you see, organised beings; gaze over that new ocean, and seek across its lawless, aimless heavings some vestiges of that intelligent Being whose wisdom strikes you with such wonder here!

"What is this world? A complex whole, subject to endless revolutions. All these revolutions show a continual tendency to destruction; a swift succession of beings who follow one another, press forward, and vanish; a fleeting symmetry; the order of a moment. I reproached you just now with estimating the perfection of things by your own capacity; and I might accuse you here of measuring its duration by the length of your own days. You judge of the continuous existence of the world, as an ephemeral insect might judge of yours. The world is eternal for you, as you are eternal to the being that lives but for one instant. Yet the insect is the more reasonable of the two. For what a prodigious succession of ephemeral generations attests your eternity! What an immeasurable tradition! Yet shall we all pass away,

without the possibility of assigning either the real extension that we filled in space, or the precise time that we shall have endured. Time, matter, space — all, it may be, are no more than a point."[71]

Diderot sent a copy of his work to Voltaire. The poet replied with his usual playful politeness, but declared his dissent from Saunderson, "who denied God, because he happened to have been born blind."[72] More pretentious, and infinitely less acute critics than Voltaire, have fixed on the same point in the argument and met it by the same answer; namely, that, blind as he was, Saunderson ought to have recognised an intelligent Being who had provided him with so many substitutes for sight; he ought to have inferred a skilful demiurgus from those ordered relations in the universe, which Thought, independently of Vision, might well have disclosed to him. In truth, this is not the centre of the whole argument. When Saunderson implies that he could only admit a God on condition that he could touch him, he makes a single sense the channel of all possible ideas, and the arbiter of all reasoned combinations of ideas. This is absurd, and Diderot, as we have seen, rapidly passed away from that to the real strength of the position. All the rest of the contention against final causes would have come just as fitly from the lips of a man with vision, as from Saunderson. The hypothetical inference of a deity from the marvels of adaptation to be found in the universe is unjustified, among other reasons, because it ignores or leaves unexplained the marvels of mis-adaptation in the universe. It makes absolute through eternity a hypothesis which can at its best only be true relatively — not merely to the number of our senses, but — to a few partially chosen phenomena of our own little day. It explains a few striking facts; it leaves wholly unexplained a far greater number of equally striking facts, even if it be not directly contradicted by them. It is the invention of an imaginary agency to account for the scanty successes of creation, and an attribution to that agency of the kind of motives that might have animated a

benevolent European living in the eighteenth century. It leaves wholly unaccounted for the prodigious host of monstrous or imperfect organisms, and the appalling law of merciless and incessant destruction.

To us this is the familiar discussion of the day. But let us return to the starting-point of this chapter. In France a hundred and twenty years ago it was the first opening of a decisive breach in the walls that had sheltered the men of Western Europe against outer desolation for some fifteen centuries or more. The completeness of Catholicism, as a self-containing system of life and thought, is now harder for Protestants or Sceptics to realise, than any other fact in the whole history of human society. Catholicism was not only an institution, nor only a religious faith; it was also a philosophy and a systematised theory of the universe. The Church during its best age directed the moral relations of individual men, and attempted, more or less successfully, to humanise the relations of communities. It satisfied or stimulated the affections by its exaltation of the Virgin Mary as a supreme object of worship; it nourished the imagination on polytheistic legends of saints and martyrs; it stirred the religious emotions by touching and impressive rites; it surrounded its members with emblems of a special and invincible protection. Catholicism, we have again and again to repeat, claimed to deal with life as a whole, and to leave no province of nature, no faculty of man, no need of intelligence or spirit, uncomprehended. But we must not forget that, though this prodigious system had its root in the affections and sympathies of human nature, it was also fenced round by a theory of metaphysic. It rested upon authority and tradition, but it also sought an expression in an intellectual philosophy of things. The essence of this philosophy was to make man the final cause of the universe. Its interpretation of the world was absolute; its conception of the Creator was absolute; its account of our intellectual impressions, of our moral rules, of our spiritual ideals, made them all absolute. Now Diderot, when he wrote

the Letter on the Blind, perceived that mere rationalistic attacks upon the sacred books, upon the miracles, upon the moral types, of Catholicism, could only be partially effective for destruction, and could have no effect at all in replacing the old ways of thinking by others of more solid truth. The attack must begin in philosophy. The first fruitful process must consist in shifting the point of view, in enlarging the range of the facts to be considered, in pressing the relativity of our ideas, in freeing ourselves from the tyranny of anthropomorphism.

Hobbes's witty definition of the papacy as the ghost of the old Roman Empire sitting enthroned on the grave thereof, may tempt us to forget the all-important truth that the basis of the power of the ghost was essentially different from that of the dissolved body. The Empire was a political organisation, resting on military force. The Church was a social organisation, made vital by a conviction. The greatest fact in the intellectual history of the eighteenth century is the decisive revolution that overtook that sustaining conviction. The movement and the men whom we are studying owe all their interest to the share that they had in this immense task. The central conception, that the universe was called into existence only to further its Creator's purpose towards man, became incredible. This absolute proposition was slowly displaced by notions of the limitation of human faculties, and of the comparatively small portion of the whole cosmos or chaos to which we have reason to believe that these faculties give us access. To substitute this relative point of view for the absolute, was the all-important preliminary to the effectual breaking up of the great Catholic construction.

What seems to careless observers a mere metaphysical dispute was in truth, and still is, the decisive quarter of the great battle between theology and a philosophy reconcilable with science. When the Catholic reaction set in, Joseph de Maistre, by far its acutest champion in the region of

philosophy, at once made it his first business to attack the principle of relativity with all his force of dialectic, and to reinstate absolute modes of thinking, and the absolute quality of Catholic propositions about religion, knowledge, and government.[73] Yet neither he nor any one else on his side has ever effectively shaken the solid argument which Diderot fancifully illustrated in the following passage from his reply to Voltaire's letter of thanks for the opuscule: "This marvellous order and these wondrous adaptations, what am I to think of them? That they are metaphysical entities only existing in your own mind. You cover a vast piece of ground with a mass of ruins falling hither or thither at hazard; amid these the worm and the ant find commodious shelter enough. What would you say of these insects, if they were to take for real and final entities the relations of the places which they inhabit to their organisation, and then fall into ecstasies over the beauty of their subterranean architecture, and the wonderfully superior intelligence of the gardener who arranges things so conveniently for them?"[74] This is the notion which Voltaire himself three years afterwards illustrated in the witty fancies of *Micromégas*. The little animalcule in the square cap, who makes the giant laugh in a Homeric manner by its inflated account of itself as the final cause of the universe, is the type of the philosophy on which Catholicism is based.

In the same letter Diderot avows his dissent — hypocritically, we find reason for suspecting — from Saunderson's conclusion. "It is commonly in the night-time," he says, "that the mists arise which obscure in me the existence of God; the rising of the sun never fails to scatter them. But then the darkness is ever-enduring for the blind, and the sun only rises for those who see." Diderot's denial of atheism seems more than suspicious, when one finds him taking so much pains to make out Saunderson's case for him, when he urges the argument following, for instance: "If there had never existed any but material beings, there would never have been spiritual

beings; for then the spiritual beings would either have given themselves existence, or else would have received it from the material beings. But if there had never existed any but spiritual beings, you will see that there would never have been material beings. Right philosophy only allows me to suppose in things what I can distinctly perceive in them. Now I perceive no other faculties distinctly in the mind except those of willing and thinking, and I no more conceive that thought and will can act on material beings or on nothing, than I can conceive material beings or nothing acting on spiritual beings." And he winds up his letter thus: "It is very important not to take hemlock for parsley; but not important at all to believe or to disbelieve in God. The world, said Montaigne, is a tennis-ball that he has given to philosophers to toss hither and thither; and I would say nearly as much of the Deity himself."[75]

In concluding our account of this piece, we may mention that Diderot threw out a hint, which is a good illustration of the alert and practically helpful way in which his mind was always seeking new ideas. We have common signs, he said, appealing to the eye, namely, written characters, and others appealing to the ear, namely, articulate sounds; we have none appealing to touch. "For want of such a language, communication is entirely broken between us and those who are born deaf, dumb, and blind. They grow, but they remain in a state of imbecility. Perhaps they would acquire ideas, if we made ourselves understood by them from childhood in a fixed, determinate, constant, and uniform manner; in short, if we traced on their hand the same characters that we trace upon paper, and invariably attached the same significance to them."[76] The patient benevolence and ingenuity of Dr. Howe of Boston has realised in our own day the value of Diderot's suggestion.

One or two trifling points of literary interest may be noticed in the Letter on the Blind. Diderot refers to "the ingenious expression of an English

geometer that *God geometrises*" (p. 294). He is unaware apparently of the tradition which attributes the expression to Plato, though it is not found in Plato's writings. Plutarch, I believe, is the first person who mentions the saying, and discusses what Plato exactly meant by it. In truth, it is one of that large class of dicta which look more ingenious than they are true. There is a fine Latin passage by Barrow on the mighty geometry of the universe, and the reader of the *Religio Medici* (p. 42) may remember that Sir Thomas Browne pronounces God to be "like a skilful geometrician."

An odd coincidence of simile is worth mentioning. Diderot says "that great services are like large pieces of money, that we have seldom any occasion to use. Small attentions are a current coin that we always carry in our hands." This is curiously like the saying in the *Tatler* that "A man endowed with great perfections without good breeding is like one who has his pockets full of gold, but wants change for his ordinary occasions." Yet if Diderot had read the *Tatler*, he would certainly have referred to the story in No. 55, how William Jones of Newington, born blind, was brought to sight at the age of twenty — a story told in a manner after Diderot's own heart.

II.

It is proper in this place to mention a short philosophic piece which Diderot wrote in 1751, his *Letter on the Deaf and Dumb for the Use of those who Hear and Talk*. This is not, like the Letter on the Blind, the examination of a case of the Intellect deprived of one or more of the senses. It is substantially a fragment, and a very important fragment, on Æsthetics, and as such there will be something to say about it in another chapter. But there are, perhaps, one or two points at which the Letter on the Deaf and Dumb touches the line of thought of the Letter on the Blind.

The Letter opens on the question of the origin and limits of inversion in language. This at once leads to a discussion of the natural order of ideas and

expressions, and that original order, says Diderot, we can only ascertain by a study of the language of gesture. Such a study can be pursued either in assiduous conversation with one who has been deaf and dumb from birth, or by the experiment of a *muet de convention*, a man who foregoes the use of articulate sounds for the sake of experiment as to the process of the formation of language. Generalising this idea, Diderot proceeds to consider man as distributed into as many distinct and separate beings as he has senses. "My idea would be to decompose a man, so to speak, and to examine what he derives from each of the senses with which he is endowed. I have sometimes amused myself with this kind of metaphysical anatomy; and I found that of all the senses, the eye was the most superficial; the ear, the proudest; smell, the most voluptuous; taste, the most superstitious and the most inconstant; touch, the profoundest and the most of a philosopher. It would be amusing to get together a society, each member of which should have no more than one sense; there can be no doubt that they would all treat one another as out of their wits."

This is interesting, because it was said at the time to be the source of one of the most famous fancies in the philosophical literature of the century, the Statue in Condillac's Treatise on the Sensations. Condillac imagined a statue organised like a man, but each sense unfolding itself singly, at the will of an eternal arbiter. The philosopher first admits the exercise of smell to his Frankenstein, and enumerates the mental faculties which might be expected to be set in operation under the changing impressions made upon that one sense. The other senses are imparted to it in turn, one by one, each adding a new group of ideas to the previous stock, until at length the mental equipment is complete.

We may see the extent of the resemblance between Condillac's Statue and Diderot's *muet de convention*, but Diderot at least is free from the charge of borrowing. Condillac's book was published three years (1754)

after the Letter on the Deaf and Dumb, and he afterwards wrote a pamphlet defending himself from the charge of having taken the fancy of his Statue from Diderot; nor, for that matter, did Diderot ever make sign or claim in the matter. We have already spoken of the relations between the two philosophers, and though it is a mistake to describe Diderot as one of Condillac's most celebrated pupils,[77] yet there is just as little reason to invert the connection, or to doubt Condillac's own assertion that the Statue was suggested to him by Mademoiselle Ferrand, that remarkable woman to whose stimulating and directing influence he always professed such deep obligation. Attention has been called to the fact that in 1671 a Parisian bookseller published a Latin version of a much more intelligent and scientific fancy than the Statue — the *Philosophus Autodidactus* of the Arabian, Ibn Tophail. This was a romance, in which a human being is suckled by a gazelle on a desert island in the tropics, and grows up in the manner of some Robinson Crusoe with a turn for psychological speculation, and gradually becomes conscious, through observation, of the peculiar properties belonging to his senses.[78]

Of the part of the Letter that concerns gesture, one can only say that it appears astonishingly crude to those who know the progress that has been made since Diderot's time in collecting and generalising the curious groups of fact connected with gesture-language. We can imagine the eager interest that Diderot would have had in such curious observations as that gesture-language has something like a definite syntax; that it furnishes no means of distinguishing causation from sequence or simultaneity; that savages can understand and be understood with ease and certainty in a deaf-and-dumb school.[79] Diderot was acute enough to see that the questions of language could only be solved, not by the old metaphysical methods, but experientially. For the experiential method in this matter the time was not

ripe. It was no wonder, then, that after a few pages, he broke away and hastened to æsthetics.

III.

Penalties on the publication of heretical opinion did not cease in England with the disappearance of the Licensing Act. But they were at least inflicted by law. It was the Court of King's Bench which, in 1730, visited Woolston with fine and imprisonment, after all the forms of a prosecution had been duly gone through. It was no Bishop's court nor Star Chamber, much less a warrant signed by George the Third or by Bute, which in 1762 condemned Peter Annet to the pillory and the gaol for his Free Inquirer. The only evil which overtook Mandeville for his Fable of the Bees was to be harmlessly presented (1723) as a public nuisance by the Grand Jury of Middlesex. We may contrast with this the state of things which prepared a revolution in France.

One morning in July, 1749 — almost exactly forty years before that July of '89, so memorable in the annals of arbitrary government and state prisons — a commissary of police and three attendants came to Diderot's house, made a vigorous scrutiny of his papers, and then produced a warrant for his detention. The philosopher, without any ado, told his wife not to expect him home for dinner, stepped into the chaise, and was driven off with his escort to Vincennes. His real offence was a light sneer in the Letter on the Blind at the mistress of a minister.[80] The atheistical substance of the essay, however, apart from the pique of a favourite, would have given sufficiently good grounds for a prosecution in England, and in France for that vile substitute for prosecution, the *lettre-decachet*. And there happened to be special causes for harshness towards the press at this moment. Verses had been published satirising the king and his manner of life in bitter terms, and a stern raid was made upon all the scribblers in Paris. At the court there

had just taken place one of those reactions in favour of the ecclesiastical party, which for thirty years in the court history alternated so frequently with movements in the opposite direction. The gossip of the town set down Diderot's imprisonment to a satire against the Jesuits, of which he was wrongly supposed to be the author.[81] It is not worth while to seek far for a reason, when authority was as able and as ready to thrust men into gaol for a bad reason as for a good one. The writer or the printer of a philosophical treatise was at this moment looked upon in France much as a magistrate now looks on the wretch who vends infamous prints.

The lieutenant of police (Berryer) treated the miserable author with additional severity, for stubbornly refusing to give up the name of the printer. Diderot was well aware that the printer would be sent to the galleys for life, if the lieutenant of police could once lay hands upon him. This personage, we may mention, was afterwards raised to the dignified office of keeper of the seals, as a reward for his industry and skill in providing victims for the royal seraglio at Versailles.[82] The man who had ventured to use his mind, was thrown into the dungeon at Vincennes by the man who played spy and pander for the Pompadour. The official record of a dialogue between Berryer and Denis Diderot, "of the Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman religion," is a singular piece of reading, if we remember that the prisoner's answers were made, "after oath taken by the respondent to speak and answer the truth."

"Interrogated if he has not composed a work entitled *Letters on the Blind*.

"Answered no.

"Interrogated by whom he had caused said work to be printed.

"Answered that he had not caused the said work to be printed.

"Interrogated if he knows the name of the author of the said work.

"Answered that he knows nothing about it.

“Interrogated whether he has not had said work in manuscript in his possession before it was printed.

“Answered that he had not had the said manuscript in his possession before or after it was printed.

“Interrogated whether he has not composed a work which appeared some years ago, entitled *Philosophic Thoughts*.

“Answered no.”

And so, after a dozen more replies of equal veracity, on reading being made to the respondent of the present interrogatory, Diderot “said that the answers contain the truth, persisted in them, and signed,” as witness his hand. A sorrowful picture, indeed, of the plight of an apostle of a new doctrine. On the other hand, the apostle of the new doctrine was perhaps good enough for the preachers of the old. Two years before this, the priest of the church of Saint Médard had thought it worth while to turn spy and informer. This is the report which the base creature sent to the lieutenant of police (1747): —

“Diderot, a man of no profession, living, etc., is a young man who plays the free-thinker, and glories in impiety. He is the author of several works of philosophy, in which he attacks religion. His talk is like his books. He is busy at the composition of one now, which is very dangerous.”

The priest’s delation was confirmed presently by a still lower agent of authority, who, in bad grammar and bad spelling, describes “this wretch Diderot as a very dangerous man, who speaks of the holy mysteries of our religion with contempt; who corrupts manners, and who says that when he comes to the last moment of his life, he will have to do like others, will confess, and will receive what we call our God, but it will only be for the sake of his family.”[83]

All these things had prepared an unfriendly fate for Diderot when his time at last came, as it came to most of his friends. For a month he was cut

off from the outer world. His only company was the *Paradise Lost*, which he happened to have in his pocket at the moment of his arrest. He compounded an ink for himself, by scraping the slate at the side of his window, grinding it very fine, and mixing with wine in a broken glass. A toothpick, found by happy accident in the pocket of his waistcoat, served him for pen, and the fly-leaves and margins of the Milton made a repository for his thoughts. With a simple but very characteristic interest in others who might be as unfortunate as himself, he wrote upon the walls of his prison his short recipe for writing materials.[84] Diderot might easily have been buried here for months or even years. But, as it happened, the governor of Vincennes was a kinsman of Voltaire's divine Emily, the Marquise du Châtelet. When Voltaire, who was then at Luneville, heard of Diderot's ill-fortune, he proclaimed as usual his detestation of a land where bigots can shut up philosophers under lock and key, and as usual he at once set to work to lessen the wrong. Madame du Châtelet was made to write to the governor, praying him to soften the imprisonment of Socrates-Diderot as much as he could.[85] It was the last of her good deeds, for she died in circumstances of grotesque tragedy in the following month (Sept. 1749), and her husband, her son, Voltaire, and Saint Lambert alternately consoled and reproached one another over her grave. Diderot meanwhile had the benefit of her intervention. He was transferred from the dungeon to the château, was allowed to wander about the park on his parole, and to receive visits from his friends. One of the most impulsive of these friends was Jean Jacques. Their first meeting after Diderot's imprisonment has been, described by Rousseau himself, in terms at which the phlegmatic will smile — not wisely, for the manner of expressing emotion, like all else, is relative. "After three or four centuries of impatience, I flew into the arms of my friend. indescribable moment! He, was not alone; D'Alembert and the treasurer of the Sainte Chapelle were with him. As I went in, I saw no one

but himself. With a single hound and a cry, I pressed his face close to mine, I clasped him tightly in my arms, without speaking to him save by my tears and sobs; I was choking with tenderness and joy."[86] After this Rousseau used to walk over to see him two or three times a week. It was during one of these walks on a hot summer afternoon, that he first thought of that memorable literary effort, the essay against civilisation. He sank down at the foot of a tree, and feverishly wrote a page or two to show to his friend. He tells us that but for Diderot's encouragement he should hardly have executed his design. There is a story that it was Diderot who first suggested to Rousseau to affirm that arts and sciences had corrupted manners. There is no violent improbability in this. Diderot, for all the robustness and penetration of his judgment, was yet often borne by his natural impetuosity towards the region of paradox. His own curious and bold *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville* is entirely in the vein of Rousseau's discourse on the superiority of primitive over civilised life. "Prodigious sibyl of the eighteenth century," cries Michelet, "the mighty magician Diderot! He breathed out one day a breath; lo, there sprang up a man — Rousseau."[87] It is hard to believe that such an astonishing genius for literature as Rousseau's could have lain concealed, after he had once inhaled the vivifying air of Paris. Yet the fire and inspiring energy of Diderot may well have been the quickening accident that brought his genius into productive life. All the testimony goes to show that it was so. Whether, however, Diderot is really responsible for the perverse direction of Rousseau's argument is a question of fact, and the evidence is not decisive.[88] It would be an odd example of that giant's nonchalance which is always so amazing in Diderot, if he really instigated the most eloquent and passionate writer then alive to denounce art and science as the scourge of mankind, at the very moment when he was himself straining his whole effort to spread the arts and sciences, and to cover them with glory in men's eyes.

Among Diderot's other visitors was Madame de Puisieux. One day she came clad in gay apparel, bound for a merry-making at a neighbouring village. Diderot, conceiving jealous doubts of her fidelity, received assurance that she would be solitary and companionless at the feast, thinking mournfully of her persecuted philosopher lying in prison. She forgot that one of the parents of philosophy is curiosity, and that Diderot had trained himself in the school of the sceptics. That evening he scaled the walls of the park of Vincennes, flew to the scene of the festival, and there found what he had expected. In vain for her had he written upon virtue and merit, and the unhallowed friendship came to an end.

After three months of captivity, Diderot was released. The booksellers who were interested in the Encyclopædia were importunate with the authorities to restore its head and chief to an enterprise that stirred universal curiosity.[89] For the first volume of that famous work was now almost ready to appear, and expectation was keen. The idea of the book had occurred to Diderot in 1745, and from 1745 to 1765 it was the absorbing occupation of his life. Of the value and significance of the conception underlying this immense operation, I shall speak in the next chapter. There also I shall describe its history. The circumstances under which these five-and-thirty volumes were given to the world mark Diderot for one of the few true heroes of literature. They called into play some of the most admirable of human qualities. They required a laboriousness as steady and as prolonged, a wariness as alert, a grasp of plan as firm, a fortitude as patient, unvarying, and unshaken, as men are accustomed to applaud in the engineer who constructs some vast and difficult work, or the commander who directs a hardy and dangerous expedition.

CHAPTER V. THE ENCYCLOPÆDIA.



THE HISTORY OF the encyclopædic conception of human knowledge is a much more interesting and important object of inquiry than a list of the various encyclopædic enterprises to be found in the annals of literature. Yet it is proper here to mention some of the attempts in this direction, which preceded our memorable book of the eighteenth century. It is to Aristotle, no doubt, that we must look for the first glimpse of the idea that human knowledge is a totality, whose parts are all closely and organically connected with one another. But the idea that only dawned in that gigantic understanding was lost for many centuries. The compilations of Pliny are not in a right sense encyclopædic, being presided over by no definite idea of informing order. It was not until the later middle age that any attempt was made to present knowledge as a whole. Albertus Magnus, "the ape of Aristotle" (1193-1280), left for a season the three great questions of the existence of universals, of the modes of the existence of species and genus, and of their place in or out of the bosom of the individuals, and executed a compilation of such physical facts as had been then discovered.[90] A more distinctly encyclopædic work was the book of Vincent de Beauvais (*d.* 1264), called *Speculum naturale, morale, doctrinale, et historiale* — a compilation from Aquinas in some parts, and from Aristotle in others. Hallam mentions three other compilations of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and observes that their laborious authors did not much improve the materials which they had amassed in their studies, though they sometimes arranged them conveniently. In the mediæval period, as he remarks, the want of capacity to discern probable truths was a very great drawback from the value of their compilations.[91]

Far the most striking production of the thirteenth century in this kind was the *Opus Majus* of Roger Bacon (1267), of which it has been said that it is at once the Encyclopædia and the Novum Organum of that age;[92] at once a summary of knowledge, and the suggestion of a truer method. This, however, was merely the introductory sketch to a vaster encyclopædic work, the *Compendium Philosophiæ*, which was not perfected. "In common with minds of great and comprehensive grasp, his vivid perception of the intimate relationship of the different parts of philosophy, and his desire to raise himself from the dead level of every individual science, induced Bacon to grasp at and embrace the whole."[93] In truth, the encyclopædic spirit was in the air throughout the thirteenth century. It was the century of books bearing the significant titles of Summa, or Universitas, or Speculum.

The same spirit revived towards the middle of the sixteenth century. In 1541 a book was published at Basel by one Ringelberg, which first took the name of Cyclopædia, that has since then become so familiar a word in Western Europe. This was followed within sixty years by several other works of the same kind. The movement reached its height in a book which remained the best in its order for a century. A German, one J.H. Alsted (1588-1638), published in 1620 an *Encyclopædia scientiarum omnium*. A hundred years later the illustrious Leibnitz pronounced it a worthy task to perfect and amend Alsted's book. What was wanting to the excellent man, he said, was neither labour nor judgment, but material, and the good fortune of such days as ours. And Leibnitz wrote a paper of suggestions for its extension and improvement.[94] Alsted's Encyclopædia is of course written in Latin, and he prefixes to it by way of motto the celebrated lines in which Lucretius declares that nothing is sweeter than to dwell apart in the serene temples of the wise. Though he informs us in the preface that his object was to trace the outlines of the great "latifundium regni philosophici" in a single syntagma, yet he really does no more than arrange a number of separate

treatises or manuals, and even dictionaries, within the limits of a couple of folios. As is natural to the spirit of the age in which he wrote, great predominance is given to the verbal sciences of grammar, rhetoric, and formal logic, and a verbal or logical division regulates the distribution of the matter, rather than a scientific regard for its objective relations.

For the true parentage, however, of the Encyclopædia of Diderot and D'Alembert, it is unnecessary to prolong this list. It was Francis Bacon's idea of the systematic classification of knowledge which inspired Diderot, and guided his hand throughout. "If we emerge from this vast operation," he wrote in the Prospectus, "our principal debt will be to the chancellor Bacon, who sketched the plan of a universal dictionary of sciences and arts at a time when there were not, so to say, either arts or sciences." This sense of profound and devoted obligation was shared by D'Alembert, and was expressed a hundred times in the course of the work. No more striking panegyric has ever been passed upon our immortal countryman than is to be found in the Preliminary Discourse.[95] The French Encyclopædia was the direct fruit of Bacon's magnificent conceptions. And if the efficient origin of the Encyclopædia was English, so did the occasion rise in England also.

In 1727 Ephraim Chambers, a Westmoreland Quaker, published in London two folios, entitled, a Cyclopædia or Universal Dictionary of the Arts and Sciences. The idea of it was broad and excellent. "Our view," says Chambers, "was to consider the several matters, not only in themselves, but relatively, or as they respect each other; both to treat them as so many wholes, and as so many parts of some greater whole." The compiler lacked the grasp necessary to realise this laudable purpose. The book has, however, the merit of conciseness, and is a singular monument of literary industry, for it was entirely compiled by Chambers himself. It had a great success, and though its price was high (four guineas), it ran through five editions in

eighteen years. On the whole, however, it is meagre, and more like a dictionary than an encyclopædia, such as Alsted's for instance.

Some fifteen years after the publication of Chambers's Cyclopædia, an Englishman (Mills) and a German (Sellius) went to Le Breton with a project for its translation into French. The bookseller obtained the requisite privilege from the government, but he obtained it for himself, and not for the projectors. This trick led to a quarrel, and before it was settled the German died and the Englishman returned to his own country. They left the translation behind them duly executed.[96] Le Breton then carried the undertaking to a certain abbé, Gua de Malves. Gua de Malves (*b.* 1712) seems to have been a man of a busy and ingenious mind. He was the translator of Berkeley's *Hylas and Philonous*, of Anson's Voyages, and of various English tracts on currency and political economy. It is said that he first suggested the idea of a cyclopædia on a fuller plan,[97] but we have no evidence of this. In any case, the project made no advance in his hands. The embarrassed bookseller next applied to Diderot, who was then much in need of work that should bring him bread. His fertile and energetic intelligence transformed the scheme. By an admirable intuition, he divined the opportunity which would be given by the encyclopædic form, of gathering up into a whole all that new thought and modern knowledge, which existed as yet in unsystematic and uninterpreted fragments. His enthusiasm fired Le Breton. It was resolved to make Chambers's work a mere starting-point for a new enterprise of far wider scope.

"The old and learned D'Aguesseau," says Michelet, "notwithstanding the pitiable, the wretched sides of his character, had two lofty sides, his reform of the laws, and a personal passion, the taste and urgent need of universality, a certain encyclopædic sense. A young man came to him one day, a man of letters living by his pen, and somewhat under a cloud for one or two hazardous books that lack of bread had driven him to write. Yet this

stranger of dubious repute wrought a miracle. With bewilderment the old sage listened to him unrolling the gigantic scheme of a book that should be all books. On his lips, sciences were light and life. It was more than speech, it was creation. One would have said that he had made these sciences, and was still at work, adding, extending, fertilising, ever engendering. The effect was incredible. D'Aguesseau, a moment above himself, forgot the old man, received the infection of genius, and became great with the greatness of the other. He had faith in the young man, and protected the Encyclopædia."[98]

A fresh privilege was procured (Jan. 21, 1746), and as Le Breton's capital was insufficient for a project of this magnitude, he invited three other booksellers to join him, retaining a half share for himself, and allotting the other moiety to them. As Le Breton was not strong enough to bear the material burdens of producing a work on so gigantic a scale as was now proposed, so Diderot felt himself unequal to the task of arranging and supervising every department of a book that was to include the whole circle of the sciences. He was not skilled enough in mathematics, nor in physics, which were then for the most part mathematically conceived. For that province, he associated with himself as an editorial colleague one of the most conspicuous and active members of the philosophical party. Of this eminent man, whose relations with Diderot were for some years so intimate, it is proper that we should say something.

D'Alembert was the natural son of Madame de Tencin, by whom he had been barbarously exposed immediately after his birth. "The true ancestors of a man of genius," says Condorcet finely upon this circumstance, "are the masters who have gone before him, and his true descendants are disciples that are worthy of him." He was discovered on a November night in the year 1717, by the beadle, in a nearly dying condition on the steps of the church of St. John the Round, from which he afterwards took his Christian

name. An honest woman of the common people, with that personal devotion which is less rare among the poor than among the rich, took charge of the foundling. The father, who was an officer of artillery and brother of Destouches, the author of some poor comedies, by and by advanced the small sums required to pay for the boy's schooling. D'Alembert proved a brilliant student. Unlike nearly every other member of the encyclopædic party, he was a pupil not of the Jesuits but of their rivals. The Jansenists recognised the keenness and force of their pupil, and hoped that they had discovered a new Pascal. But he was less docile than his great predecessor in their ranks. When his studies were completed, he devoted himself to geometry, for which he had a passion that nothing could extinguish. For the old monastic vow of poverty, chastity, and obedience, he adopted the manlier substitute of poverty, truth, and liberty — the worthy device of every man of letters. When he awoke in the morning, he thought with delight of the work that had been begun the previous day and would occupy the day before him. In the necessary intervals of his meditations, he recalled the lively pleasure that he felt at the play: at the play between the acts, he thought of the still greater pleasure that was promised to him by the work of the morrow. His mathematical labours led to valuable results in the principles of equilibrium and the movement of fluids, in a new calculus, and in a new solution of the problem of the precession of the equinoxes.[99]

These contributions to what was then the most popular of the sciences brought him fame, and fame brought him its usual distractions. As soon as a writer has shown himself the possessor of gifts that may be of value to society, then society straightway sets to work to seduce and hinder him from diligently exercising them. D'Alembert resisted these influences steadfastly. His means were very limited, yet he could never be induced to increase them at the cost either of his social independence or of his scientific pursuits. He lived for forty years under the humble roof of the

poor woman who had treated him as a son. “You will never be anything better than a philosopher,” she used to cry reproachfully, “and what is a philosopher? ’Tis a madman who torments himself all his life, that people may talk about him when he is dead.” D’Alembert zealously adhered to his destination. Frederick the Great vainly tempted him by an offer of the succession to Maupertuis as president of the Academy of Berlin. Although, however, he declined to accept the post, he enjoyed all its authority and prerogative. Frederick always consulted him in filling up vacancies and making appointments. It is a magnanimous trait in D’Alembert’s history that he should have procured for Lagrange a position and livelihood at Berlin, warmly commending him as a man of rare and superior genius, although Lagrange had vigorously opposed some of his own mathematical theories. Ten years after Frederick’s offer, the other great potentate of the north, Catherine of Russia, besought him to undertake the education of the young grand duke, her son. But neither urgent flatteries and solicitations under the imperial hand, nor the munificent offer of a hundred thousand francs a year, availed to draw him away from his independence and his friends. The great Frederick used to compare him to one of those oriental monarchs, who cherish a strict seclusion in order to enhance their importance and majesty. He did not refuse a pension of some fifty pounds a year from Berlin, and the same amount was bestowed upon him from the privy purse at Versailles. He received a small annual sum in addition from the Academy.

Though the mathematical sciences remained the objects of his special study, D’Alembert was as free as the other great men of the encyclopædic school from the narrowness of the pure specialist. He naturally reminds us of the remarkable saying imputed to Leibnitz, that he only attributed importance to science, because it enabled him to speak with authority in philosophy and religion. His correspondence with Voltaire, extending over

the third quarter of the century, is the most instructive record that we possess of the many-sided doings of that busy time. His series of *éloges* on the academicians who died between 1700 and 1772 is one of the most interesting works in the department of literary history. He paid the keenest attention to the great and difficult art of writing. Translations from Tacitus, Bacon, and Addison, show his industry in a useful practice. A long collection of synonyms bears witness to his fine discrimination in the use of words. And the clearness, precision, and reserved energy of his own prose mark the success of the pains that he took with style. He knew the secret. Have lofty sentiments, he said, and your manner of writing will be firm and noble.[100] Yet he did not ignore the other side and half of the truth, which is expressed in the saying of another important writer of that day — By taking trouble to speak with precision, one gains the habit of thinking rightly (*Condillac*).

Like so many others to whom literature owes much, D'Alembert was all his life fighting against bad health. Like Voltaire and Rousseau, he was born dying, and he remained delicate and valetudinarian to the end. He had the mental infirmities belonging to his temperament. He was restless, impatient, mobile, susceptible of irritation. When the young Mademoiselle Phlipon, in after years famous as wife of the virtuous Roland, was taken to a sitting of the Academy, she was curious to see the author of the Preliminary Discourse to the Encyclopædia, but his small face and sharp thin voice made her reflect with some disappointment, that the writings of a philosopher are better to know than his mask.[101] In everything except zeal for light and emancipation, D'Alembert was the opposite of Diderot. Where Diderot was exuberant, prodigal, and disordered, D'Alembert was a precisian. Difference of temperament, however, did not prevent their friendship from being for many years cordial and intimate. When the Encyclopædia was planned, it was to D'Alembert, as we have said, that

Diderot turned for aid in the mathematical sciences, where his own knowledge was not sufficiently full nor well grounded. They were in strong and singular agreement in their idea of the proper place and function of the man of letters. One of the most striking facts about their alliance, and one of the most important facts in the history of the Encyclopædia, is that henceforth the profession of letters became at once definite and independent. Diderot and D'Alembert both of them remained poor, but they were never hangers-on. They did not look to patrons, nor did they bound their vision by Versailles. They were the first to assert the lawful authority of the new priesthood. They revolted deliberately and in set form against the old system of suitorship and protection. "Happy are men of letters," wrote D'Alembert, "if they recognise at last that the surest way of making themselves respectable is to live united and almost shut up among themselves; that by this union they will come, without any trouble, to give the law to the rest of the nation in all affairs of taste and philosophy; that the true esteem is that which is awarded by men who are themselves worthy of esteem.... As if the art of instructing and enlightening men were not, after the too rare art of good government, the noblest portion and gift in human reach."[102]

This consciousness of the power and exaltation of their calling, which men of letters now acquired, is much more than the superficial fact which it may at first seem to be. It marked the rise of a new teaching order and the supersession of the old. The highest moral ideas now belonged no longer to the clergy, but to the writers; no longer to official Catholicism, but to that fertilising medley of new notions about human knowledge and human society which then went by the name of philosophy. What is striking is that the ideas sown by philosophy became eventually the source of higher life in Catholicism. If the church of the revolution showed something that we may justly admire, it was because the encyclopædic band had involuntarily and

inevitably imparted a measure of their own clearsightedness, fortitude, moral energy, and spirit of social improvement, to a church which was, when they began their work, an abominable burden on the spiritual life of the nation. If the Catholicism of Chateaubriand, of Lamennais, of Montalembert, was a different thing from the Catholicism of a Dubois, or a Rohan, from the vile corruptions of the Jesuits and the grovelling superstitions of the later Jansenists, it was the execrated freethinkers whom the church and mankind had to thank for the change. The most enlightened Catholic of to-day ought to admit that Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau, were the true reformers of his creed. They supplied it with ideas which saved it from becoming finally a curse to civilisation. It was no Christian prelate, but Diderot who burst the bonds of a paralysing dogma by the magnificent cry, *Détruisez ces enceintes qui rétrécissent vos idées! Elargissez Dieu!*[103] We see the same phenomenon in our own day. The Christian churches are assimilating as rapidly as their formula will permit, the new light and the more generous moral ideas and the higher spirituality of teachers who have abandoned all churches, and who are systematically denounced as enemies of the souls of men. *Sic vos non vobis mellificatis apes!* These transformations of religion by leavening elements contributed from a foreign doctrine, are the most interesting process in the history of truth.

The Encyclopædia became a powerful engine for aiding such a transformation. Because it was this, and because it rallied all that was then best in France round the standard of light and social hope, we ought hardly to grudge time or pains to its history. For it was not merely in the field of religious ideas that the Encyclopædists led France in a new way. They affected the national life on every side, pressing forward with enlightened principles in all the branches of material and political organisation. Their union in a great philosophical band gave an impressive significance to their work. The collection within a single set of volumes of a body of new truths,

relating to so many of the main interests of men, invested the book and its writers with an aspect of universality, of collective and organic doctrine, which the writers themselves would without doubt have disowned, and which it is easy to dissolve by tests of logic. But the popular impression that the Encyclopædists constituted a single body with a common doctrine and a common aim was practically sound. Comte has pointed out with admirable clearness the merit of the conception of an encyclopædic workshop.[104] It united the members of rival destructive schools in a great constructive task. It furnished a rallying-point for efforts otherwise the most divergent. Their influence was precisely what it would have been, if popular impressions had been literally true. Diderot and D'Alembert did their best to heighten this feeling. They missed no occasion of fixing a sentiment of co-operation and fellowship. They spoke of their dictionary as the transactions of an Academy.[105] Each writer was answerable for his own contribution, but he was in the position of a member of some learned corporation. To every volume, until the great crisis of 1759, was prefixed a list of those who had contributed to it. If a colleague died, the public was informed of the loss that the work had sustained, and his services were worthily commemorated in a formal *éloge*.[106] Feuds, epigrams, and offences were not absent, but on the whole there was steadfast and generous fraternity.

As Voltaire eloquently said, officers of war by land and by sea, magistrates, physicians who knew nature, men of letters whose taste purified knowledge, geometers, physicists, all united in a work that was as useful as it was laborious, without any view of interest, without even seeking fame, as many of them concealed their names; finally without any common understanding and agreement, and therefore without anything of the spirit of party.[107] Turning over the pages on which the list of writers is inscribed, we find in one place or another nearly every name that has helped to make the literature of the time famous. Montesquieu, who died in the

beginning of 1755, left behind him the unfinished fragment of an article on Taste, and it may be noticed in passing that our good-natured Diderot was the only man of letters who attended the remains of the illustrious writer to the grave.[108] The article itself, though no more than a fragment, has all the charms of Montesquieu's delightful style; it is serious without pedantry, graceful without levity, and is rich in observations that are precise and pointed without the vice of emphasis. The great Turgot, diligently solicitous for the success of every enterprise that promised to improve human happiness by adding to knowledge and spreading enlightenment, wrote some of the most valuable articles that the work contained, and his discussion of Endowments perhaps still remains the weightiest contribution to that important subject. Oddly enough, he was one of the very few writers who refused to sign his name to his contributions.[109] His assistance only ceased when he perceived that the scheme was being coloured by that spirit of sect, which he always counted the worst enemy of the spirit of truth.[110] Jean Jacques Rousseau, who had just won a singular reputation by his paradoxes on natural equality and the corruptions of civilisation, furnished the articles on music in the first half dozen volumes. They were not free from mistakes, but his colleagues chivalrously defended him by the plea of careless printing or indifferent copying.[111] The stately Buffon very early in the history of the Encyclopædia sent them an article upon Nature, and the editors made haste to announce to their subscribers the advent of so superb a colleague.[112] The articles on natural history, however, were left by Buffon in his usual majestic fashion to his faithful lieutenant and squire-at-arms, Daubenton. And even his own article seems not to have been printed. Before the eleventh volume appeared, terrible storms had arisen, not a few of the shipmen had parted company, and Buffon may well have been one of them. Certainly the article on Nature, as it stands, can hardly be his.

In the supplementary volumes, which appeared in 1776 — ten years after the completion of the original undertaking — two new labourers came into the vineyard, whose names add fresh lustre and give still more serious value to the work. One of these was the prince of the physiologists of the eighteenth century, the great Haller, who contributed an elaborate history of those who had been his predecessors in unfolding the intricate mechanism of the human frame, and analysing its marvels of complex function. The other was the austere and generous Condorcet. Ever loyal to good causes, and resolute against despairing of the human commonwealth, he began in the pages of the Encyclopædia a career that was brilliant with good promise and high hopes, and ended in the grim hall of the Convention and a nobly tragic death amid the red storm of the Terror.

Among the lesser stars in the encyclopædic firmament are some whose names ought not to be wholly omitted. Forbonnais, one of the most instructive economic writers of the century, contributed articles to the early volumes, which were afterwards republished in his Elements of Commerce.[113] The light-hearted Marmontel wrote cheerful articles on Comedy, Eloges, Eclogues, Glory, and other matters of literature and taste. Quesnai, the eminent founder of the economic sect, dealt with two agricultural subjects, and reproduced both his theoretical paradoxes, and his admirable practical maxims, on the material prosperity of nations. Holbach, not yet author of the memorable System of Nature, compiled a vast number of the articles on chemistry and mineralogy, chiefly and avowedly from German sources, he being the only writer of the band with a mastery of a language which was at that moment hardly more essential to culture than Russian is now. The name of Duclos should not be passed over, in the list of the foremost men who helped to raise the encyclopædic monument. He was one of the shrewdest and most vigorous intelligences of the time, being in the front rank of men of the second order. His quality was coarse, but this

was only the effect of a thoroughly penetrating and masculine understanding. His articles in the Encyclopædia (*Déclamation des Anciens*, *Etiquette*, etc.) are not very remarkable; but the reflections on conduct which he styled *Considérations sur les Mœurs de ce Siécle* (1750), though rather hard in tone, abound in an acuteness, a breadth, a soundness of perception that entitle the book to the rare distinction, among the writings of moralists and social observers, of still being worth reading. Morellet wrote upon some of the subjects of theology, and his contributions are remarkable as being the chief examples in the record of the encyclopædic body of a distinctly and deliberately historic treatment of religion. "I let people see," he wrote many years after, "that in such a collection as the Encyclopædia we ought to treat the history and experience of the dogmas and discipline of the Christian, exactly like those of the religion of Brahma or Mahomet."[114] This sage and philosophic principle enabled him to write the article, Fils de Dieu (vol. vi.), without sliding into Arian, Nestorian, Socinian, or other heretical view on that fantastic theme. We need not linger over the names of other writers, who indeed are now little more than mere shadows of names, such as La Condamine, a scientific traveller of fame and merit in his day and generation; of Du Marsais, the poverty-stricken and unlucky scholar who wrote articles on grammar; of the President Des Brosses, who was unfortunate enough to be in the right in a quarrel about money with Voltaire, and who has since been better known to readers through the fury of the provoked patriarch, than through his own meritorious contributions to the early history of civilisation.

The name of one faithful worker in the building of this new Jerusalem ought not to be omitted, though his writings were *multa non multum*. The Chevalier de Jaucourt (1704-1779), as his title shows, was the younger son of a noble house. He studied at Geneva, Cambridge, and Leyden, and published in 1734 a useful account of the life and writings of Leibnitz.

When the Encyclopædia was projected, his services were at once secured, and he became its slave from the beginning of A to the end of Z. He wrote articles in his own special subjects of natural history and physical science, but he was always ready to lend his help in other departments, in writing, rewriting, reading, correcting, and all those other humbler necessities of editorship of which the inconsiderate reader knows little and thinks less. Jaucourt revelled in this drudgery. God made him for grinding articles, said Diderot. For six or seven years, he wrote one day, Jaucourt has been in the middle of half a dozen secretaries, reading, dictating, slaving, for thirteen or fourteen hours a day, and he is not tired of it even now. When he was told that the work must positively be brought to an end, his countenance fell, and the prospect of release from such happy bondage filled his heart with desolation.[115] "If," says Diderot in the preface to the eighth volume (1765), "we have raised a shout of joy like the sailor when he espies land after a sombre night that has kept him midway between sky and flood, it is to M. de Jaucourt that we are indebted for it. What has he not done for us, especially in these latter times? With what constancy has he not refused all the solicitations, whether of friendship or of authority, that sought to take him away from us? Never has sacrifice of repose, of health, of interest been more absolute and more entire."[116] These modest and unwearying helpers in good works ought not to be wholly forgotten, in a commemoration of more far-shining names.

Besides those who were known to the conductors of the Encyclopædia, was a host of unsought volunteers. "The further we proceed," the editors announced in the preface to the sixth volume (1756), "the more are we sensible of the increase both in matter and in number of those who are good enough to second our efforts." They received many articles on the same subject. They were constantly embarrassed by an emulation which, however flattering as a testimony to their work, obliged them to make a difficult

choice, or to lose a good article, or to sacrifice one of their regular contributors, or to offend some influential newcomer. Every one who had a new idea in his head, or what he thought a new idea, sent them an article upon it. Men who were priests or pastors by profession and unbelievers in their hearts, sent them sheaves of articles in which they permitted themselves the delicious luxury of saying a little of what they thought. Women, too, pressed into the great work. Unknown ladies volunteered sprightly explanations of the technicalities of costume, from the falbala which adorned the bottom of their skirts, up to that little knot of riband in the hair, which had come to replace the old appalling edifice of ten stories high, in hierarchic succession of duchess, solitary, musketeer, crescent, firmament, tenth heaven, and mouse.[117] The oldest contributor was Lenglet du Fresnoy, whose book on the Method of Studying History is still known to those who have examined the development of men's ideas about the relations of the present to the past. Lenglet was born in 1674. The youngest of the band was Condorcet, who was born nearly seventy years later (1743). One veteran, Morellet, who had been, the schoolmate of Turgot and Loménie de Brienne, lived to think of many things more urgent than Faith, Fils de Dieu, and Fundamentals. He survived the Revolution, the Terror, the Empire, Waterloo, the Restoration, and died in 1819, within sight of the Holy Alliance and the Peterloo massacre. From the birth of Lenglet to the death of Morellet — what an arc of the circle of western experience!

No one will ask whether the keen eye, and stimulating word, and helpful hand of Voltaire were wanting to an enterprise which was to awaken men to new love of tolerance, enlightenment, charity, and justice. Voltaire was playing the refractory courtier at Potsdam when the first two volumes appeared. With characteristic vehemence, he instantly pronounced it a work which should be the glory of France, and the shame of its persecutors. Diderot and D'Alembert were raising an immortal edifice, and he would

gladly furnish them with a little stone here or there, which they might find convenient to stuff into some corner or crevice in the wall. He was incessant in his industry. Unlike those feebler and more consequential spirits, the *petits-maîtres* of thought, by whom editors are harassed and hindered, this great writer was as willing to undertake small subjects as large ones, and to submit to all the mutilations and modifications which the exigencies of the work and the difficulties of its conductors recommended to them.[118] As the structure progresses, his enthusiasm waxes warmer. Diderot and his colleague are cutting their wings for a flight to posterity. They are Atlas and Hercules bearing a world upon their shoulders. It is the greatest work in the world; it is a superb pyramid; its printing-office is the office for the instruction of the human race; and so forth, in every phrase of stimulating sympathy and energetic interest. Nor does his sympathy blind him to faults of execution. Voltaire's good sense and sound judgment were as much at the service of his friends in warning them of shortcomings, as in eulogising what they achieved. And he had good faith enough to complain to his friends, instead of complaining of them. In one place he tells them, what is perfectly true, that their journeymen are far too declamatory, and too much addicted to substitute vague and puerile dissertations for that solid instruction which is what the reader of an Encyclopædia seeks. In another he remonstrates against certain frivolous affectations, and some of the coxcombries of literary modishness. Everywhere he recommends them to insist on a firm and distinct method in their contributors — etymologies, definitions, examples, reasons, clearness, brevity. "You are badly seconded," he writes; "there are bad soldiers in the army of a great general."[119] "I am sorry to see that the writer of the article *Hell* declares that hell was a point in the doctrine of Moses; now by all the devils that is not true. Why lie about it? Hell is an excellent thing, to be sure, but it is evident that Moses did not know it. 'Tis this world that is hell."[120]

D’Alembert in reply always admitted the blemishes for which the patriarch and master reproached them, but urged various pleas in extenuation. He explains that Diderot is not always the master, either to reject or to prune the articles that are offered to him.[121] A writer who happened to be useful for many excellent articles would insist as the price of good work that they should find room for his bad work also; and so forth. “No doubt we have bad articles in theology and metaphysics, but with theologians for censors, and a privilege, I defy you to make them any better. There are other articles that are less exposed to the daylight, and in them all is repaired. Time will enable people to distinguish what we have thought from what we have said.”[122] This last is a bitter and humiliating word, but before any man hastens to cast a stone, let him first make sure that his own life is free from every trace of hypocritical conformity and mendacious compliance. Condorcet seems to make the only remark that is worth making, when he says that the true shame and disgrace of these dissemblings lay not with the writers, whose only other alternative was to leave the stagnation of opinion undisturbed, but with the ecclesiastics and ministers whose tyranny made dissimulation necessary. And the veil imposed by authority did not really serve any purpose of concealment. Every reader was let into the secret of the writer’s true opinion of the old mysteries, by means of a piquant phrase, an adroit parallel, a significant reference, an equivocal word of dubious panegyric. Diderot openly explains this in the pages of the Encyclopædia itself. “In all cases,” he says, “where a national prejudice would seem to deserve respect, the particular article ought to set it respectfully forth, with its whole procession of attractions and probabilities. But the edifice of mud ought to be overthrown and an unprofitable heap of dust scattered to the wind, by references to articles in which solid principles serve as a base for the opposite truths. This way of undeceiving men operates promptly on minds of the right stamp, and it

operates infallibly and without any troublesome consequences, secretly and without disturbance, on minds of every description."[123] "Our fanatics feel the blows," cried D'Alembert complacently, "though they are sorely puzzled to tell from which side they come."[124]

It is one of the most deplorable things in the history of literature to see a man endowed with Diderot's generous conceptions and high social aims, forced to stoop to these odious economies. In reading his Prospectus, and still more directly in his article,

Encyclopédie, we are struck by the beneficence and breadth of the great designs which inspire and support him. The Encyclopædia, it has been said, was no peaceful storehouse in which scholars and thinkers of all kinds could survey the riches they had acquired; it was a gigantic siege-engine and armoury of weapons of attack.[125] This is only true in a limited sense of one part of the work, and that not the most important part. Such a judgment is only possible for one who has not studied the book itself, or else who is ignorant of the social requirements of France at the time. We shall show this presently in detail. Meanwhile it is enough to make two observations. The implements which the circumstances of the time made it necessary to use as weapons of attack, were equally fitted for the acquisition in a happier season of those treasures of thought and knowledge which are the object of disinterested research. And what is still more important, we have to observe that it was the characteristic note and signal glory of the French revolutionary school, to subordinate mere knowledge to the practical work of raising society up from the corruption and paralysis to which it had been brought by the double action of civil and ecclesiastical authority. The efforts of the Encyclopædists were not disinterested in the sense of being vague blows in the air. Their aim was not theory but practice, not literature but life. The Encyclopædists were no doubt all men of battle, and some of them were hardly more than mere partisans.

But Diderot at least had constantly in mind the great work which remained after the battle should be won. He was profoundly conscious that the mere accumulation of knowledge of the directly physical facts of the universe would take men a very short way towards reconstruction. And he struck the key-note in such admirable passages as this: "One consideration especially that we ought never to lose from sight is that, if we ever banish a man, or the thinking and contemplative being, from above the surface of the earth, this pathetic and sublime spectacle of nature becomes no more than a scene of melancholy and silence. The universe is dumb; the darkness and silence of the night take possession of it ...It is the presence of man that gives its interest to the existence of other beings; and what better object can we set before ourselves in the history of these beings, than to accept such a consideration? Why shall we not introduce man into our work in the same place which he holds in the universe? Why shall we not make him a common centre? Is there in infinite space any other point from which we can with greater advantage draw those immense lines that we propose to extend to all other points? What a vivid and softening reaction must result between man and the beings by whom he is surrounded ...Man is the single term from which we ought to set out, and to which we ought to trace all back, if we would please, interest, touch, even in the most arid reflections and the driest details. If you take away my own existence and the happiness of my fellows, of what concern to me is all the rest of nature.'[126]

In this we hear the voice of the new time, as we do in his exclamation that the perfection of an Encyclopædia is the work of centuries; centuries had to elapse before the foundations could be laid; centuries would have to elapse before its completion: "*mais à la posérité, et* À L'ÊTRE QUI NE MEURT POINT!"[127] These exalted ideas were not a substitute for arduous labour. In all that Diderot writes upon his magnificent undertaking, we are struck by his singular union of common sense with elevation, of simplicity

with grasp, of suppleness with strength, of modesty with hopeful confidence. On occasions that would have tempted a man of less sincerity and less seriousness to bombast and inflation, his sense of the unavoidable imperfections of so vast a work always makes itself felt through his pride in its lofty aim and beneficent design. The weight of the burden steadied him, and the anxiety of the honest and laborious craftsman mastered the impulses of rhetoric.

Before going further into the general contents of the Encyclopædia, we shall briefly describe the extraordinary succession of obstacles and embarrassments against which its intrepid conductor was compelled to fight his way. The project was fully conceived and its details worked out between 1745 and 1748. The Encyclopedia was announced in 1750, in a Prospectus of which Diderot was the author. At length in 1751 the first volume of the work itself was given to the public, followed by the second in January 1752. The clerical party at once discerned what tremendous fortifications, with how deadly an armament, were rising up in face of their camp. The Jesuits had always been jealous of an enterprise in which they had not been invited to take a part. They had expected at least to have the control of the articles on theology. They now were bent on taking the work into their own hands, and orthodoxy hastily set all the machinery of its ally, authority, in vigorous motion.

The first attack was indirect. An abbé de Prades sustained a certain thesis in an official exercise at the Sorbonne, and Diderot was suspected, without good reason, of being its true author. An examination of its propositions was ordered. It was pronounced pernicious, dangerous, and tending to deism, chiefly on account of some too suggestive comparisons between the miraculous healings in the New Testament, and those ascribed in the more ancient legend to Æsculapius. Other grounds of vehement objection were found in the writer’s maintenance of the Lockian theory of the origin of our

ideas. To deny the innateness of ideas was roundly asserted to be materialism and atheism. The abbé de Prades was condemned, and deprived of his license (Jan 27, 1752). As he was known to be a friend of Diderot, and was suspected of being the writer of articles on theology in the Encyclopædia, the design of the Jesuit cabal in ruining De Prades was to discredit the new undertaking, and to induce the government to prohibit it. Their next step was to procure a pastoral from the archbishop of Paris. This document not only condemned the heretical propositions of De Prades, but referred in sombre terms to unnamed works teeming with error and impiety. Every one understood the reference, and among its effects was an extension of the vogue and notoriety of the Encyclopædia.[128] The Jesuits were not allowed to retain a monopoly of persecuting zeal, and the Jansenists refused to be left behind in the race of hypocritical intrigue. The bishop of Auxerre, who belonged to this party, followed his brother prelate of Paris in a more direct attack, in which he included not only the Encyclopædia, but Montesquieu and Buffon. De Prades took to flight. D'Alembert commended him to Voltaire, then at Berlin. The king was absent, but Voltaire gave royal protection to the fugitive until Frederick's return. De Prades was then at once taken into favour and appointed reader to the king. He proved but a poor martyr, however, for he afterwards retracted his heresies, got a benefice, and was put into prison by Frederick for giving information to his French countrymen during the Seven Years' War.[129] Unfortunately neither orthodoxy nor heterodoxy has any exclusive patent for monopoly of rascals.

Meanwhile Diderot wrote on his behalf an energetic and dignified reply to the aggressive pastoral. This apology is not such a masterpiece of eloquence as the magnificent letter addressed by Rousseau ten years later to the archbishop of Paris, after the pastoral against Emilius. But Diderot's vindication of De Prades is firm, moderate, and closely argumentative. The piece is worth turning to in our own day, when great dignitaries of the

churches too often show the same ignorance, the same temerity, and the same reckless want of charity, as the bishop of Auxerre showed a hundred and twenty years ago. They resort to the very same fallacies by way of shield against scientific truths or philosophical speculations that happen not to be easily reconcilable with their official opinions. “I know nothing so indecent,” says Diderot, “and nothing so injurious to religion as these vague declamations of theologians against reason. One would suppose, to hear them, that men could only enter into the bosom of Christianity as a herd of cattle enter into a stable; and that we must renounce our common sense either to embrace our religion or to remain in it ...Such principles as yours are made to frighten small souls; everything alarms them, because they perceive clearly the consequences of nothing; they set up connections among things which have nothing to do with one another; they spy danger in any method of arguing which is strange to them; they float at hazard between truths and prejudices which they never distinguish, and to which they are equally attached; and all their life is passed in crying out either miracle or impiety.” In an eloquent peroration, which is not more eloquent than it is instructive, De Prades is made to turn round on his Jansenist censor, and reproach him with the disturbance with which the intestine rivalries of Jansenist and Jesuit had afflicted the faithful. “It is the abominable testimony of your convulsions,” he cries, “that has overthrown the testimony of miracles. It is the fatuous audacity with which your fanatics have confronted persecution, that has annihilated the evidence of the martyrs. It is your declamations against sovereign pontiffs, against bishops, against all the orders of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, that have covered priest, altar, and creed with opprobrium. If the pope, the bishops, the priests, the simple faithful, the whole church, if its mysteries, its sacraments, its temples, its ceremonies, have fallen into contempt, yours, yours, is the handiwork.”[130]

Bourdaloue more than half a century before had taunted the free-thinkers of his day with falseness and inconsistency in taking sides with the Jansenists, whose superstitions they notoriously held in open contempt. The motive for the alliance was tolerably obvious. The Jansenists, apart from their theology, were above all else the representatives of opposition to authority. It was for this that Lewis XIV. counted them worse than atheists. The Jesuits, it has been well said in keeping down their enemies by force, became the partisans of absolute government, and upheld it on every occasion. The Jansenists, after they had been crushed by violence, began to feel to what excesses power might be brought. From being speculative enemies to freedom as a theory, they became, through the education of persecution, the partisans of freedom in practice. The quarrel of Molinists and Jansenists, from a question of theology, grew into a question of human liberty.[131]

Circumstances had now changed. The free-thinkers were becoming strong enough to represent opposition to authority on their own principles and in their own persons. Diderot's vigorous remonstrance with the bishop of Auxerre incidentally marks for us the definite rupture of philosophic sympathy for the Jansenist champions. "It is your disputatiousness," he said, "which within the last forty years has made far more unbelievers than all the productions of philosophy." As we cannot too clearly realise, it was the flagrant social incompetence of the church which brought what they called Philosophy, that is to say Liberalism, into vogue and power. Locke's Essay had been translated in 1700, but it had made no mark, and as late as 1725 the first edition of the translation remained unsold. It was the weakness and unsightly decrepitude of the ecclesiastics which opened the way for the thinkers.

This victory, however, was not yet. Diderot had still a dismal wilderness to traverse. He was not without secret friends even in the camp of his

enemies.

After his reply to Peré Berthier's attack on the Prospectus, he received an anonymous letter to the effect that if he wished to avenge himself on the Jesuits, there were both important documents and money at his command. Diderot replied that he was in no want of money, and that he had no time to spare for Jesuit documents.[132] He trusted to reason. Neither reason nor eloquence availed against the credit at court of the ecclesiastical cabal. The sale of the second volume of the Encyclopædia was stopped by orders which Malesherbes was reluctantly compelled to issue. A decree of the king's council (Feb. 7, 1752) suppressed both volumes, as containing maxims hostile to the royal authority and to religion. The publishers were forbidden to reprint them, and the booksellers were forbidden to deliver any copies that might still be in hand. The decree, however, contained no prohibition of the continuance of the work. It was probably not meant to do anything more serious than to pacify the Jesuits, and lend an apparent justification to the officious pastorals of the great prelates. Some even thought that the aim of the government was to forestall severer proceedings on the part of the parliament of lawyers;[133] for corporations of lawyers have seldom been less bigoted or obstructive than corporations of churchmen. Nor were lawyers and priests the only foes. Even the base and despicable jealousies of booksellers counted for something in the storm.[134]

A curious triumph awaited the harassed Diderot.

He was compelled, under pain of a second incarceration, to hand over to the authorities all the papers, proof-sheets, and plates in his possession. The Jesuit cabal supposed that if they could obtain the materials for the future volumes, they could easily arrange and manipulate them to suit their own purposes. Their ignorance and presumption were speedily confounded. In taking Diderot's papers, they had forgotten, as Grimm says, to take his head and his genius: they had forgotten to ask him for a key to articles which, so

far from understanding, they with some confusion vainly strove even to decipher. The government was obliged (May 1752) to appeal to Diderot and D'Alembert to resume a work for which their enemies had thus proved themselves incompetent. Yet, by one of the meannesses of decaying authority, the decree of three months before was left suspended over their heads.[135]

The third volume of the Encyclopædia appeared in the autumn of 1753. D'Alembert prefixed an introduction, vindicating himself and his colleague with a manliness, a sincerity, a gravity, a fire, that are admirable and touching. "What," he concluded, "can malignity henceforth devise against two men of letters, trained long since by their meditations to fear neither injustice nor poverty; who having learnt by a long and mournful experience, not to despise, but to mistrust and dread men, have the courage to love them, and the prudence to flee them?... After having been the stormy and painful occupation of the most precious years of our life, this work will perhaps be the solace of its close. May it, when both we and our enemies alike have ceased to exist, be a durable monument of the good intention of the one, and the injustice of the other.... Let us remember the fable of Bocalina: 'A traveller was disturbed by the importunate chirrupings of the grasshoppers; he would fain have slain them every one, but only got belated and missed his way; he need only have fared peacefully on his road, and the grasshoppers would have died of themselves before the end of a week.'"[136] A volume was now produced in each year, until the autumn of 1757 and the issue of the seventh volume. This brought the work down to Gyromancy and Gythiuin. Then there arose storms and divisions which marked a memorable epoch alike in the history of the book, in the life of Diderot and others, and in the thought of the century. The progress of the work in popularity during the five years between 1752 and 1757 had been steady and unbroken. The original subscribers were barely two thousand. When the

fourth volume appeared, there were three thousand. The seventh volume found nearly a thousand more.[137] Such prodigious success wrought the chagrin of the party of superstition to fever heat. As each annual volume came from the press and found a wider circle of readers than its predecessor, their malice and irritation waxed a degree more intense. They scattered malignant rumours abroad; they showered pamphlets; no imputation was too odious or too ridiculous for them. Diderot, D'Alembert, Voltaire, Rousseau, Buffon, were declared to have organised a league of writers, with the deliberate purpose of attacking the public tranquillity and overthrowing society. They were denounced as heads of a formal conspiracy, a clandestine association, a midnight band, united in a horrible community of pestilent opinions and sombre interests.

In the seventh volume an article appeared which made the ferment angrier than it had ever been. D'Alembert had lately been the guest of Voltaire at Ferney, whence he had made frequent visits to Geneva. In his intercourse with the ministers of that famous city, he came to the conclusion that their religious opinions were really Socinian, and when he wrote the article on Geneva he stated this. He stated it in such a way as to make their heterodox opinions a credit to Genevese pastors, because he associated disbelief in the divinity of Jesus Christ, in mysteries of faith, and in eternal punishment, with a practical life of admirable simplicity, purity, and tolerance. Each line of this eulogy on the Socinian preachers of Geneva, veiled a burning and contemptuous reproach against the cruel and darkened spirit of the churchmen in France. Jesuit and Jansenist, loose abbès and debauched prelates, felt the quivering of the arrow in the quick, as they read that the morals of the Genevese pastors were exemplary; that they did not pass their lives in furious disputes upon unintelligible points; that they brought no indecent and persecuting accusation against one another before the civil magistrate. There was gall and wormwood to the orthodox bigot in

the harmless statement that “Hell, which is one of the principal articles of our belief, has ceased to be one with many of the ministers of Geneva; it would be, according to them, a great insult to the divinity, to imagine that this Being, so full of justice and goodness, is capable of punishing our faults by an eternity of torment: they explain in as good a sense as they can the formal passages of Scripture which are contrary to their opinion, declaring that we ought never in the sacred books to take anything literally, that seems to wound humanity and reason.” And we may be sure that D’Alembert was thinking less of the consistory and the great council of Geneva, than of the priests and the parliament of Paris, when he praised the Protestant pastors, not only for their tolerance, but for confining themselves within their proper functions, and for being the first to set an example of submission to the magistrates and the laws. The intention of this elaborate and, reasoned account of the creed and practice of a handful of preachers in a heretical town, could not be mistaken by those at whom it was directed. It produced in the black ranks of official orthodoxy fully as angry a shock as its writer could have designed.

The church had not yet, we must remember, borrowed the principles of humanity and tolerance from atheists. It was not the comparatively purified Christian doctrine of our own time with which the Encyclopædists did battle, but an organised corporation, with exceptional tribunals, with special material privileges, with dungeons and chains at their disposal. We have to realise that official religion was then a strange union of Byzantine decrepitude, with the energetic ferocity of the Holy Office. Within five years of this indirect plea of D’Alembert for tolerance and humanity, Calas was murdered by the orthodoxy of Toulouse. Nearly ten years later (1766), we find Lewis XV., with the steam of the Parc aux Cerfs about him, rewarded by the loyal acclamations of a Parisian crowd, for descending from his carriage as a priest passed bearing the sacrament, and prostrating

himself in the mud before the holy symbol.[138] In the same year the youth La Barre was first tortured, then beheaded, then burnt, for some presumed disrespect to the same holy symbol — then become the hateful ensign of human degradation, of fanatical cruelty, of rancorous superstition. Yet I should be sorry to be unjust. It is to be said that even in these bad days when religion meant cruelty and cabal, the one or two men who boldly withstood to the face the king and the Pompadour for the vileness of their lives, were priests of the church.

D'Alembert's article hardly goes beyond what to us seem the axioms of all men of sense. We must remember the time. Even members of the philosophic party itself, like Grimm, thought the article misplaced and hardy.[139] The Genevese ministers indignantly repudiated the compliment of Socinianism, and the eulogy of being rather less irrational than their neighbours. Voltaire read and read again with delight, and plied the writer with reiterated exhortations in every key, not to allow himself to be driven from the great work by the raging of the heathen and the vain imaginings of the people.[140]

While the storm seemed to be at its height, an incident occurred which let loose a new flood of violent passion. Helvétius published that memorable book in which he was thought to have told all the world its own secret. His *De l'Esprit* came out in 1758.[141] It provoked a general insurrection of public opinion. The devout and the heedless agreed in denouncing it as scandalous, licentious, impious, and pregnant with peril. The philosophic party felt that their ally had dealt a sore blow to liberty of thought and the free expression of opinion. "Philosophy," said Grimm, by philosophy, as I have said, meaning Liberalism, "will long feel the effect of the rising of opinion which this author has caused by his book; and for having described too freely a morality that is bad and false in itself, M. Helvétius will have to reproach himself with all the restraints that are now

sure to be imposed on the few men of lofty genius who still are left to us, whose destiny was to enlighten their fellows, and to spread truth over the earth."[142]

At the beginning of 1759 the procureur-général laid an information before the court against Helvétius's book, against half a dozen minor publications, and finally against the Encyclopædia. The *De l'Esprit* was alleged to be a mere abridgment of the Encyclopædia, and the Encyclopædia was denounced as being the opprobrium of the nation by its impious maxims and its hostility to morals and religion. The court appointed nine commissaries to examine the seven volumes, suspending their further sale or delivery in the meanwhile. When the commissaries sent in their report a month later, the parliament was dissatisfied with its tenour, and appointed four new examiners, two of them being theologians and two of them lawyers. Before the new censors had time to do their work, the Council of State interposed with an arbitrary decree (March 1759) suppressing the privilege which had been conceded in 1746; prohibiting the sale of the seven volumes already printed, and the printing of any future volumes under pain of exemplary punishment.[143] The motive for this intervention has never been made plain. One view is that the king's government resented the action of the law courts, and that the royal decree was only an episode in the quarrel then raging between the crown and the parliaments. Another opinion is that Malesherbes or

Choiseul was anxious to please the dauphin and the Jesuit party at Versailles. The most probable explanation is that the authorities were eager to silence one at least of the three elements of opposition, the Jansenists, the lawyers, and the philosophers, — who were then distracting the realm. The two former were beyond their direct reach. They threw themselves upon the foe who happened to be most accessible.

The government, however, had no intention of finally exterminating an enemy who might at some future day happen to be a convenient ally. They encouraged or repressed the philosophers according to the political calculations of the moment, sometimes according to the caprices of the king's mistress, or even a minister's mistress. When the clergy braved the royal authority, the hardiest productions were received with indulgence. If the government were reduced to satisfy the clergy, then even the very commonplaces of the new philosophy became ground for accusation. The Encyclopædia was naturally exposed in a special degree to such alternations of favour and suspicion.[144] The crisis of 1759 furnishes a curious illustration of this. As we have seen, in the spring of that year the privilege was withdrawn from the four associated booksellers, and the continuance of the work strictly prohibited. Yet the printing was not suspended for a week. Fifty compositors were busily setting up a book which the ordinance of the government had decisively forbidden under heavy penalties.

The same kind of connivance was practised to the advantage of other branches of the opposition. Thirty years before this, the organ of the Jansenist party was peremptorily suppressed. The police instituted a rigorous search, and seized the very presses on which the Nouvelles Ecclésiastiques was being printed. But the journal continued to appear, and was circulated, just as regularly as before.[145]

The history of the policy of authority towards the Encyclopædia is only one episode in the great lesson of the reign of Lewis XV. It was long a common mistake to think of this king's system of government as violent and tyrannical. In truth, its failure and confusion resulted less from the arbitrariness of its procedure, than from the hopeless absence of tenacity, conviction, and consistency in the substance and direction of its objects. And this, again, was the result partly of the complex and intractable nature of the opposition with which successive ministers had to deal, and partly of

the overpowering strength of those Asiatic maxims of government which Richelieu and Lewis XIV. had invested with such ruinous prestige. The impatience and charlatanry of emotional or pseudo-scientific admirers of a personal system blind them to the permanent truth, of which the succession of the decrepitude of Lewis XV. to the strength of his great-grandfather, and of the decrepitude of Napoleon III. to the strength of his uncle, are only illustrations.

The true interest of all these details about a mere book lies in the immense significance of the movement of political ideas and forces to which they belong. The true interest of all history lies in the spectacle which it furnishes of the growth and dissolution, the shock and the transformation, incessantly at work among the great groups of human conceptions. The decree against the Encyclopædia marks the central moment of a collision between two antagonistic conceptions which disputed, and in France still dispute, with one another the shaping and control of institutions. One of these ideas is the exclusion of political authority from the sphere and function of directing opinion; it implies the absolute secularisation of government. The rival idea prompted the massacre of St. Bartholomew, the dragonnades, the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and all the other acts of the same policy, which not only deprived France of thousands of the most conscientious and most ingenious of her sons, but warped and corrupted the integrity of the national conscience. It is natural that we should feel anger at the arbitrary attempt to arrest Diderot's courageous and enlightened undertaking. Yet in truth it was only the customary inference from an accepted principle, that it is the business or the right of governments to guide thought and regulate its expression. The Jesuits acted on this theory, and resorted to repressive power and the secular arm whenever they could. The Jansenists repudiated the principle, but eagerly practised it whenever the turn of intrigue gave them the chance.

An extraordinary and unforeseen circumstance changed the external bearings of this critical conflict of ideas. The conception of the duties of the temporal authority in the spiritual sphere had been associated hitherto with Catholic doctrine. The decay of that doctrine was rapidly discrediting the conception allied with it. But the movement was interrupted. And it was interrupted by a man who suddenly stepped out from the ranks of the Encyclopædists themselves. Rousseau from his solitary cottage at Montmorency (1758) fulminated the celebrated letter to D'Alembert on Stage Plays. The article on Geneva in the seventh volume of the Encyclopædia had not only praised the pastors for their unbelief; it also assailed the time-honoured doctrine of the churches that the theatre is an institution from hell and an invention of devils. D'Alembert paid a compliment to his patriarch and master at Ferney, as well as shot a bolt at his ecclesiastical foes in Paris, by urging the people of Geneva to shake off irrational prejudices and straightway to set up a playhouse. Rousseau had long been brooding over certain private grievances of his own against Diderot; the dreary story has been told by me before, and happily need not be repeated.[146] He took the occasion of D'Alembert's mischievous suggestion to his native Geneva, not merely to denounce the drama with all the force and eloquence at his command, but formally to declare the breach between himself and Diderot. From this moment he treated the Holbachians — so he contemptuously styled the Encyclopædists — as enemies of the human race and disseminators of the deadliest poisons.

This was no mere quarrel of rival authors. It marked a fundamental divergence in thought, and proclaimed the beginning of a disastrous reaction in the very heart of the school of illumination. Among the most conspicuous elements of the reaction were these: the subordination of reason to emotion; the displacement of industry, science, energetic and many-sided ingenuity, by dreamy indolence; and finally, what brings us

back to our starting-point, the suppression of opinions deemed to be anti-social by the secular arm. The old idea was brought back in a new dress; the absolutist conception of the function of authority, associated with a theistic doctrine. Unfortunately for France, Rousseau's idea prospered, and ended by vanquishing its antagonist. The reason is plain. Rousseau's idea exactly fitted in with the political traditions and institutions of the country. It was more easily and directly compatible than was the contending idea, with that temper and set of men's minds which tradition and institutions had fixed so disastrously deep in the national character.

The crisis of 1758-59, then, is a date of the highest importance. It marks a collision between the old principle of Lewis XIV., of the Bartholomew Massacre, of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and the new rationalistic principle of spiritual emancipation. The old principle was decrepit, it was no longer able to maintain itself; the hounds were furious, but their fury was toothless. Before the new principle could achieve mastery, Rousseau had made mastery impossible. Two men came into the world at this very moment, whom destiny made incarnations of the discordant principles. Danton and Robespierre were both born in 1759. Diderot seems to have had a biblical presentiment, says Michelet. "We feel that he saw, beyond Rousseau, something sinister, a spectre of the future. Diderot-Danton already looks in the face of Rousseau-Robespierre."[147]

A more vexatious incident now befell the all-daring, all-enduring Diderot, than either the decree of the Council or the schism of the heresiarch at Montmorency. D'Alembert declared his intention of abandoning the work, and urged his colleague to do the same. His letters to Voltaire show intelligibly enough how he brought himself to this resolution. "I am worn out," he says, "with the affronts and vexations of every kind that this work draws down upon us. The hateful and even infamous satires which they print against us, and which are not only tolerated, but protected,

authorised, applauded, nay, actually commanded by the people with power in their hands; the sermons, or rather the tocsins that are rung against us at Versailles in the presence of the king, *nemine reclamante*; the new intolerable inquisition that they are bent on practising against the Encyclopædia, by giving us new censors who are more absurd and more intractable than could be found at Goa; all these reasons, joined to some others, drive me to give up this accursed work once for all." He cared nothing for libels or stinging pamphlets in themselves, but libels permitted or ordered by those who could instantly have suppressed them, were a different thing, especially when they vomited forth the vilest personalities. He admitted that there were other reasons why he was bent on retiring, and it would appear that one of these reasons was dissatisfaction with the financial arrangements of the booksellers.[148]

Voltaire for some time remonstrated against this retreat before the hated *Infâme*. At length his opinion came round to D'Alembert's reiterated assertions of the shame and baseness of men of letters subjecting themselves to the humiliating yoke of ministers, priests, and police. Voltaire wrote to Diderot, protesting that before all things it was necessary to present a firm front to the foe; it would be atrocious weakness to continue the work after D'Alembert had quitted it; it was monstrous that such a genius as Diderot should make himself the slave of booksellers and the victim of fanatics. Must this dictionary, he asked, which is a hundred times more useful than Bayle's, be fettered with the superstition which it should annihilate; must they make terms with scoundrels who keep terms with none; could the enemies of reason, the persecutors of philosophers, the assassins of our kings, still dare to lift up their voices in such a century as that? "Men are on the eve of a great revolution in the human mind, and it is you to whom they are most of all indebted for it."[149]

More than once Voltaire entreated Diderot to finish his work in a foreign country where his hands would be free. “No,” said Diderot in a reply of pathetic energy; “to abandon the work is turning our back upon the breach, and to do precisely what the villains who persecute us desire. If you knew with what joy they have learnt D’Alembert’s desertion! It is not for us to wait until the government have punished the brigands to whom they have given us up. Is it for us to complain, when they associate with us in their insults men who are so much better than ever we shall be? What ought we to do then? Do what becomes men of courage, — despise our foes, follow them up, and take advantage, as we have done, of the feebleness of our censors. If D’Alembert resumes, and we complete our work, is not that vengeance enough?... After all this, you will believe that I cling at any price to the Encyclopædia, and you will be mistaken. My dear master, I am over forty. I am tired out with tricks and shufflings. I cry from morning till night for rest, rest; and scarcely a day passes when I am not tempted to go and live in obscurity and die in peace in the depths of my old country. There comes a time when all ashes are mingled. Then what will it boot me to have been Voltaire or Diderot, or whether it is your three syllables or my three syllables that survive? One must work, one must be useful, one owes an account of one’s gifts, etcetera, etcetera. Be useful to men! Is it quite clear that one does more than amuse them, and that there is much difference between the philosopher and the flute-player? They listen to one or the other with pleasure or disdain, and remain what they were. The Athenians were never wickeder than in the time of Socrates, and perhaps all that they owe to his existence is a crime the more. That there is more spleen than good sense in all this, I admit — and back I go to the Encyclopædia.”[150]

Thus for seven years the labour of conducting the vast enterprise fell upon Diderot alone. He had not only to write articles upon the most exhausting and various kinds of subjects; he had also to distribute topics

among his writers, to shape their manuscripts, to correct proof-sheets, to supervise the preparation of the engravings, to write the text explanatory of them, and all this amid constant apprehension and alarm from the government and the police. He would have been free from persecution at Lausanne or at Leyden. The two great sovereigns of the north who thought it part of the trade of a king to patronise the new philosophy, offered him shelter at Petersburg or Berlin.[151]

But how could he transport to the banks of the Neva or the Spree his fifty skilled compositors, his crafty engravers on copper-plate, and all the host of his industrial army? How could he find in those half-barbarous lands the looms and engines and thousand cunning implements and marvellous processes which he had under his eye and ready to his hand in France? And so he held fast to his post on the fifth floor of the house in the Rue Saint Benoît, a standing marvel to the world of letters for all time.

As his toil was drawing to a close, he suddenly received the most mortifying of all the blows that were struck at him in the course of his prolonged, hazardous, and tormenting adventure. After the interruption in 1759, it was resolved to bring out the ten volumes which were still wanting, in a single issue. Le Breton was entrusted with the business of printing them. The manuscript was set in type, Diderot corrected the proof-sheets, saw the revises, and returned each sheet duly marked with his signature for the press. At this point the nefarious operation of Le Breton began. He and his foreman took possession of the sheets, and proceeded to retrench, cut out, and suppress every passage, line, or phrase, that appeared to them to be likely to provoke clamour or the anger of the government. They thus, of their own brute authority, reduced most of the best articles to the condition of fragments mutilated and despoiled of all that had been most valuable in them. The miscreants did not even trouble themselves to secure any appearance of order or continuity in these mangled skeletons of articles.

Their murderous work done, they sent the pages to the press, and to make the mischief beyond remedy, they committed all the original manuscripts and proof-sheets to the flames. One day, when the printing was nearly completed (1764), Diderot having occasion to consult an article under the letter S, found it entirely spoiled. He stood confounded. An instant's thought revealed the printer's atrocity. He eagerly turned to the articles on which he and his subordinates had taken most pains, and found everywhere the same ravages and disorder. "The discovery," says Grimm, "threw him into a state of frenzy and despair which I shall never forget."[152] He wept tears of rage and torment in the presence of the criminal himself, and before wife and children and sympathising domestics. For weeks he could neither eat nor sleep. "For years," he cried to Le Breton, "you have been basely cheating me. You have massacred, or got a brute beast to massacre, the work of twenty good men who have devoted to you their time, their talents, their vigils, from love of right and truth, from the simple hope of seeing their ideas given to the public, and reaping from them a little consideration richly earned, which your injustice and thanklessness have now stolen from them for ever.... You and your book will be dragged through the mire; you will henceforth be cited as a man who has been guilty of an act of treachery, an act of vile hardihood, to which nothing that has ever happened in this world can be compared. Then you will be able to judge your panic terror, and the cowardly counsels of those barbarous Ostrogoths and stupid Vandals who helped you in the havoc you have made."[153]

Yet he remained undaunted to the very last. His first movement to throw up the work, and denounce Le Breton's outrage to the subscribers and the world, was controlled. His labour had lost its charm. The monument was disfigured and defaced. He never forgot the horrible chagrin, and he never forgave the ignoble author of it. But the last stone was at length laid. In 1765 the subscribers received the concluding ten volumes of letterpress.

The eleven volumes of plates were not completed until 1772. The copies bore Neufchâtel on the title-page, and were distributed privately. The clergy in their assembly at once levelled a decree at the new book. The parliament quashed this, not from love of the book, but from hatred of the clergy. The government, however, ordered all who possessed the Encyclopædia to deliver it over forthwith to the police. Eventually the copies were returned to their owners with some petty curtailments.

Voltaire has left us a vivacious picture of authority in grave consultation over the great engine of destruction. With that we may conclude our account of its strange eventful history.

A servant of Lewis xv. told me that one day the king his master supping at Trianon with a small party, the talk happened to turn first upon the chase, and next on gunpowder. Some one said that the best powder was made of equal parts of saltpetre, of sulphur, and of charcoal. The Duke de la Vallière, better informed, maintained that to make good gunpowder you required one part of sulphur and one of charcoal to five parts of saltpetre.

"It is curious," said the Duke de Nivernois, "that we should amuse ourselves every day in killing partridges at Versailles, and sometimes in killing men or getting ourselves killed on the frontier, without knowing exactly how the killing is done."

"Alas," said Madame de Pompadour, "we are all reduced to that about everything in the world: I don't know how they compound the rouge that I put on my cheeks, and I should be vastly puzzled if they were to ask me how they make my silk stockings."

"'Tis a pity, then," said the Duke de la Vallière, "that his Majesty should have confiscated our Encyclopædias, which cost us a hundred pistoles apiece: we should soon find there an answer to all our difficulties."

The king justified the confiscation: he had been warned that one-and-twenty folios, that were to be found on the dressing-tables of all the ladies,

were the most dangerous thing in all the world for the kingdom of France; and he meant to find out for himself whether this were true or not, before letting people read the book. When supper was over, he sent three lackeys for the book, and they returned each with a good deal of difficulty carrying seven volumes.

It was then seen from the article *Powder* that the Duke de la Vallière was right; and then Madame de Pompadour learnt the difference between the old rouge of Spain, with which the ladies of Madrid coloured their faces, and the rouge of the ladies of Paris. She knew that the Greek and Roman ladies were painted with the purple that came from the *murex*, and that therefore our scarlet is the purple of the ancients; that there was more saffron in the rouge of Spain, and more cochineal in that of France.

She saw how they made her stockings by loom; and the machine transported her with amazement.

Everyone threw himself on the volumes like the daughters of Lycomedes on the ornaments of Ulysses; every one immediately found all he sought. Those who were at law were surprised to see their affair decided. The king read all about the rights of his crown. “But upon my word,” he said, “I can’t tell why they spoke so ill of this book.” “Do you not see, sire, said the Duke de Nivernois, “it is because the book is so good; people never cry out against what is mediocre or common in anything. If women seek to throw ridicule on a new arrival, she is sure to be prettier than they are.”

All this time they kept on turning over the leaves; and the Count de C —— said aloud— “Sire, how happy you are, that under your reign men should be found capable of understanding all the arts and transmitting them to posterity. Everything is here, from the way to make a pin down to the art of casting and pointing your guns; from the infinitely little up to the infinitely great. Thank God for having brought into the world in your kingdom the men who have done such good work for the whole universe.

Other nations must either buy the Encyclopædia, or else they must pirate it. Take all my property if you will, but give me back my Encyclopædia."

"Yet they say," replied the king, "that there are many faults in this work, necessary and admirable as it is."

"Sire," said the Count de C —— , "there were at your supper two ragouts which were failures; we left them uneaten, and yet we had excellent cheer. Would you have had them throw all the supper out of the window because of those two ragouts?..."

Envy and Ignorance did not count themselves beaten; the two immortal sisters continued their cries, their cabals, their persecutions. What happened? Foreigners brought out four editions of this French book which in France was proscribed, and they gained about 1,800,000 crowns.[154]

In a monotonous world it is a pity to spoil a striking effect, yet one must be vigilant. It has escaped the attention of writers who have reproduced this lively scene, that Madame de Pompadour was dead before the volumes containing Powder and Rouge were born. The twenty-one volumes were not published until 1765, and she died in the spring of the previous year. But the substance of the story is probably true, though Voltaire has only made a slip in a name.

As to the reference with which Voltaire impatiently concludes, we have to remember that the work was being printed at Geneva as it came out in Paris. It was afterwards reprinted as a whole both at Geneva (1777) and at Lausanne (1778). An edition appeared at Leghorn in 1770, and another at Lucca in 1771. Immediately after the completion of the Encyclopædia there began to appear volumes of selections from it. The compilers of these anthologies (for instance of an *Esprit de l'Encydopédie* published at Geneva in 1768) were free from all intention of proselytising. They meant only to turn a more or less honest penny by serving up in neat duodecimos the

liveliest, most curious, and most amusing pieces to be found in the immense mass of the folios of the original.

The Encyclopædia of Diderot, though not itself the most prodigious achievement on which French booksellers may pride themselves, yet inspired that achievement. In 1782 Panckoucke — a familiar name in the correspondence of Voltaire and the Voltairean family — conceived the plan of a Methodical Encyclopædia. This colossal work, which really consists of a collection of special cyclopædias for each of the special sciences, was not completed until 1832, and comprises one hundred and sixty-six volumes of text, with a score more volumes of plates. It has no unity of doctrine, no equal application of any set of philosophic principles, and no definite social aim. The only encyclopædia since 1772 with which I am acquainted, that is planned with a view to the presentation of a general body of doctrine, is the unfinished Encyclopédie Nuevelle of Pìerre Leroux and Jean Reynaud. This work was intended to apply the socialistic and spiritualistic ideas of its authors over the whole field of knowledge and speculation. The result is that it furnishes only a series of dissertations, and is not an encyclopædia in the ordinary sense.[155]

The booksellers at first spoke of the Encyclopædia as an affair of two million livres. It appeared, however that its cost did not go much beyond one million one hundred and forty thousand livres. The gross return was calculated to be nearly twice as much. The price to the subscriber of the seven volumes up to 1757, of the ten volumes issued in 1765, and of the eleven volumes of plates completed in 1772, amounted to nine hundred and eighty livres,[156] or about forty-three pounds sterling of that date, equivalent in value to more than three times the sum in money of to-day.

The payment received by Diderot is a little doubtful, and the terms were evidently changed from time to time. His average salary, after D'Alembert had quitted him, seems to have amounted to about three thousand livres, or

one hundred and thirty pounds sterling, per annum. This coincides with Grimm's statement that the total sum received by Diderot was sixty thousand livres, or about two thousand six hundred pounds sterling.[157] And to think, cried Voltaire, when he heard of Diderot's humble wage, that an army contractor makes twenty thousand livres a day! Voltaire himself had made a profit of more than half a million livres by a share in an army contract in the war of 1734, and his yearly income derived from such gains and their prudent investment was as high as seventy thousand livres, representing in value a sum not far short of ten thousand pounds a year of our present money.

II.

All writers on the movement of illumination in France in the eighteenth century, call our attention to the quick transformation, which took place after the middle of the century, of a speculative or philosophical agitation into a political or social one. Readers often find some difficulty in understanding plainly how or why this metamorphosis was brought about. The metaphysical question which men were then so fond of discussing, whether matter can think, appears very far removed indeed from the sphere of political conceptions. The psychological question whether our ideas are innate, or are solely given to us by experience through the sensations, may strike the publicist as having the least possible to do with the type of a government or the aims of a community. Yet it is really the conclusions to which men come in this region, that determine the quality of the civil sentiment and the significance of political organisation. The theological doctors who persecuted De Prades for suggestions of Locke's psychology, and for high treason against Cartesianism, were guided by a right instinct of self-preservation. De Maistre, by far the most acute and penetrating of the Catholic school, was never more clear-sighted than when he made a

vigorous and deliberate onslaught upon Bacon, the centre of his movement against revolutionary principles.[158]

As we have said before, the immediate force of speculative literature hangs on practical opportuneness. It was not merely because Bacon and Hobbes and Locke had written certain books, that the Encyclopædists, who took up their philosophic succession, inevitably became a powerful political party, and multiplied their adherents in an increasing proportion as the years went on. From various circumstances the attack acquired a significance and a weight in France which it had never possessed in England. For one thing, physical science had in the interval taken immense strides. This both dwarfed the sovereignty of theology and theological metaphysics, and indirectly disposed men's minds for non-theological theories of moral as well as of physical phenomena. In France, again, the objects of the attack were inelastic and unyielding. Political speculation in England followed, and did not precede, political innovation and reform. In France its light played round institutions which were too deeply rooted in absolutism and privilege to be capable of substantial modification. Deism was comparatively impotent against the Church of England, first, because it was an intellectual movement, and not a social one; second, because the constitutional doctrines of the church were flexible. Deism in the hands of its French propagators became connected with social liberalism, because the Catholic church in those days was identified with all the ideas of repression. And the tendencies of deism in France grew more violently destructive, not only because religious superstition was grosser, but because that superstition was incorporated in a strong and inexpansible social structure.

"It would be a mistake," wrote that sagacious and well-informed observer, D'Argenson, so early as 1753, "to attribute the loss of religion in France to the English philosophy, which has not gained more than a hundred philosophers or so in Paris, instead of setting it down to the hatred

against the priests, which goes to the very last extreme. All minds are turning to discontent and disobedience, and everything is on the high road to a great revolution, both in religion and in government. And it will be a very different thing to that rude Reformation, a medley of superstition and freedom, which came to us from Germany in the sixteenth century! As our nation and our century are enlightened in so very different a fashion, they will go whither they ought to go; they will banish every priest, all priesthood, all revelation, all mystery." This, however, only represents the destructive side of the vast change which D'Argenson then foresaw, six-and-thirty years before its consummation. That change had also a constructive side. If one of its elements was hate, another and more important element was hope. This constructive and reforming spirit which made its way in the intelligence of the leading men in France from 1750 to 1789, was represented in the encyclopædic confederation, and embodied in their forty folios. And, to return to our first point, it was directly and inseparably associated with the philosophy of Bacon and Locke. What is the connection between their speculations and a vehement and energetic spirit of social reform? We have no space here to do more than barely hint the line of answer.

The broad features of the speculative revolution of which the Encyclopædia was the outcome, lie on the surface of its pages and cannot be mistaken. The transition from Descartes to Newton meant the definite substitution of observation for hypothesis. The exaltation of Bacon meant the advance from supernatural explanations to explanations from experience. The acceptance and development of the Lockian psychology meant the reference of our ideas to bodily sensations, and led men by what they thought a tolerably direct path to the identification of mind with functions of matter. We need not here discuss the philosophical truth or adequateness of these ways of considering the origin and nature of

knowledge, or the composition of human character. All that now concerns us is to mark their tendency. That tendency clearly is to expel Magic as the decisive influence among us, in favour of ordered relations of cause and effect, only to be discovered by intelligent search. The universe began to be more directly conceived as a group of phenomena that are capable of rational and connected explanation. Then, the wider the area of law, the greater is man's consciousness of his power of controlling forces, and securing the results that he desires. Objective interests and their conditions acquire an increasing preponderance in his mind. On the other hand, as the limits of science expand, so do the limits of nescience become more definite. The more we know of the universal order, the more are we persuaded, however gradually and insensibly, that certain matters which men believed themselves to know outside of this phenomenal order, are in truth inaccessible by those instruments of experience and observation to which we are indebted for other knowledge. Hence, a natural inclination to devote our faculty to the forces within our control, and to withdraw it from vain industry about forces — if they be forces — which are beyond our control and beyond our apprehension. Thus man becomes the centre of the world to himself, nature his servant and minister, human society the field of his interests and his exertions. The sensational psychology, again, whether scientifically defensible or not, clearly tends to heighten our idea of the power of education and institutions upon character. The more vividly we realise the share of external impressions in making men what they are, the more ready we shall be to concern ourselves with external conditions and their improvement. The introduction of the positive spirit into the observation of the facts of society was not to be expected until the Cartesian philosophy, with its reliance on inexplicable intuitions and its exaggeration of the method of hypothesis, had been laid aside.

Diderot struck a key-note of difference between the old Catholic spirit and the new social spirit, between quietist superstition and energetic science, in the casual sentence in his article on alms-houses and hospitals: "*It would be far more important to work at the prevention of misery, than to multiply places of refuge for the miserable*."

It is very easy to show that the Encyclopædists had not established an impregnable scientific basis for their philosophy. Anybody can now see that their metaphysic and psychology were imperfectly thought out. The important thing is that their metaphysic and psychology were calculated, notwithstanding all their superficialities, to inspire an energetic social spirit, because they were pregnant with humanistic sentiment. To represent the Encyclopædia as the gospel of negation and denial is to omit four-fifths of its contents. Men may certainly, if they please, describe it as merely negative work, for example, to denounce such institutions as examination and punishment by Torture (See *Question, Peine*), but if so, what gospel of affirmation can bring better blessings?[159] If the metaphysic of these writers had been a thousandfold more superficial than it was, what mattered that, so long as they had vision for every one of the great social improvements on which the progress and even the very life of the nation depended? It would be obviously unfair to say that reasoned interest in social improvement is incompatible with a spiritualistic doctrine, but we are justified in saying that energetic faith in possibilities of social progress has been first reached through the philosophy of sensation and experience.

In describing the encyclopædic movement as being, among other things, the development of political interest under the presiding influence of a humanistic philosophy, we are using the name of politics in its widest sense. The economic conditions of a country, and the administration of its laws, are far more vitally related to its well-being than the form of its government. The form of government is indeed a question of the first

importance, but then this is owing in a paramount degree to the influence which it may have upon the other two sets of elements in the national life. Form of government is like the fashion of a man's clothes; it may fret or may comfort him, may be imposing or mean, may react upon his spirits to elate or depress them. In either case it is less intimately related to his welfare than the state of his blood and tissues. In saying, then, that the Encyclopædists began a political work, what is meant is that they drew into the light of new ideas, groups of institutions, usages, and arrangements which affected the real well-being and happiness of France, as closely as nutrition affected the health and strength of an individual Frenchman. It was the Encyclopædists who first stirred opinion in France against the iniquities of colonial tyranny and the abominations of the slave trade. They demonstrated the folly and wastefulness and cruelty of a fiscal system that was eating the life out of the land. They protested in season and out of season against arrangements which made the administration of justice a matter of sale and purchase. They lifted up a strong voice against the atrocious barbarities of an antiquated penal code. It was this band of writers, organised by a harassed man of letters, and not the nobles swarming round Lewis XV., nor the churchmen singing masses, who first grasped the great principle of modern society, the honour that is owed to productive industry. They were vehement for the glories of peace, and passionate against the brazen glories of war.[160]

We are not to suppose that the Encyclopædia was the originating organ of either new methods or new social ideas. The exalted and peculiarly modern views about peace, for instance, were plainly inspired from the writings of the Abbé Saint Pierre (1658-1743) — one of the most original spirits of the century, who deserves to be remembered among other good services as the inventor of the word *bienfaisance*. Again, in the mass of the political articles we feel the immense impulse that was given to sociological

discussion by the Esprit des Lois. Few questions are debated here, which Montesquieu had not raised, and none are debated without reference to Montesquieu's line of argument. The change of which we are conscious in turning from the Esprit des Lois to the Encyclopædia is that political ideas have been grasped as instruments. Philosophy has become patriotism. The Encyclopædists advanced with grave solicitude to the consideration of evils, to which the red-heeled parasites of Versailles were insolently and incorrigibly blind.

The articles on Agriculture, for example, are admirable alike for the fulness and precision with which they expose the actual state of France; for the clearness with which they trace its deplorable inadequateness back to the true sources; and for the strong interest and sympathy in the subject, which they both exhibit and inspire. If now and again the touch is too idyllic, it was still a prodigious gain to let the country know in a definite way that of the fifty million arpents of cultivable land in the realm, more than one quarter lay either unbroken or abandoned. And it was a prodigious gain to arouse the attention of the general public to the causes of the forced deterioration of French agriculture, namely, the restrictions on trade in grain, the arbitrariness of the imposts, and the flight of the population to the large towns. Then the demonstration, corroborated in the pages of the Encyclopædia by the two patriotic vaunts of contemporary English writers, of the stimulus given to agriculture by our system of free exports, contained one of the most useful lessons that the French had to learn.

Again, there are some abuses which cannot be more effectively attacked, than by a mere statement of the facts in the plainest and least argumentative terms. The history of such an impost as the tax upon salt (*Gabelle*), and a bold outline of the random and incongruous fashions in which it was levied, were equivalent to a formal indictment. It needed no rhetoric nor discussion to heighten the harsh injustice of the rule that "persons who have changed

domicile are still taxed for a certain time in the seat of their former abode, namely, farmers and labourers for one year, and all other tax-payers for two years, provided the parish to which they have removed is within the same district; and if otherwise, then farmers to pay for two years, and other persons for three years" (*Taille*). Thus a man under the given circumstances would have to pay double taxes for three years as a penalty for changing his dwelling. We already hear the murmur of the *cahiers* of five-and-twenty years later in the account of the transports of joy with which the citizens of Lisieux saw the *taille proportionelle* established (1718), and how numerous other cities sent up prayers that the same blessing might be conferred on them. "Reasons that it is not for us to divine, caused the rejection of these demands; so hard is it to do a good act, which everybody talks about, much more in order to seem to desire it, than from any intention of really doing it.... To illustrate the advantages of this plan, the impost of 1718 with all arrears for five years was discharged in twelve months without needless cost or dispute. By an extravagance more proper than any other to degrade humanity, the common happiness made malcontents of all that class whose prosperity depends on the misery of others," — that is the privileged class.[161]

It is no innate factiousness, as flighty critics of French affairs sometimes imply, that has made civil equality the passion of modern France. The root of this passion is an undying memory of the curse that was inflicted on its citizens, morally and materially, by the fiscal inequalities of the old *régime*. The article, *Privilegé*, urges the desirableness of inquiring into the grounds of the vast multitude of fiscal exemptions, and of abolishing all that were no longer associated with the performance of real and useful service. "A bourgeois," says the writer, anticipating a cry that was so soon to ring through the land, "a bourgeois in comfortable circumstances, and who could himself pay half of the *taille* of a whole parish, if it were imposed in its due

proportion, — on payment of the amount of his taxes for one or for two years, and often for less; without birth, education, or talents, buys a place in a local salt office, or some useless charge at court, or in the household of some prince.... This man proceeds to enjoy in the public eye all the exemptions possessed by the nobility and the high magistracy.... From such an abuse of privileges spring two very considerable evils: the poorer part of the citizens are always burdened beyond their strength, though they are the most useful to the State, since this class is composed of those who cultivate the land, and procure a subsistence for the upper classes; the other evil is that privileges disgust persons of education and talent with the idea of entering the magistracy or other professions demanding labour and application, and lead them to prefer small posts and paltry offices." And so forth, with a gravity and moderation, that were then common in political discussion in France. It gradually disappeared in 1789, when it was found that the privileged orders, even at that time, in their *cahiers* steadily demanded the maintenance of every one of their most odious and iniquitous rights.[162]

When it is said, then, that the Encyclopædists deliberately prepared the way for a political revolution, let us remember that what they really did was to shed the light of rational discussion on such practical grievances as even the most fatuous conservative in France does not now dream of bringing back.

Let us turn to two other of the most oppressive institutions that then scourged France. First the *Corvée*, or feudal rule which forced every unprivileged farmer and peasant in France to furnish so many days' labour for the maintenance of the highways. Arthur Young tells us, and the statement is confirmed by the Minutes of Turgot, that this wasteful, cruel, and inefficient system was annually the ruin of many hundreds of persons, and he mentions that no less than three hundred farmers were reduced to

beggary in filling up a single vale in Lorraine.[163] Under this all-important head, the Encyclopædia has an article that does not merely add to the knowledge of its readers by a history of the *corvées*, but proceeds to discuss, as in a pamphlet or review article, the inconveniences of the prevailing system, and presses schemes for avoiding them. Turgot had not yet shown in practice the only right substitute. The article was printed in 1754, and it was not until ten years later that this great administrator, then become intendant of the Limousin, did away in his district with compulsory personal service on the roads, and required in its place a money payment assessed on the parishes.[164] The writer of the article in the Encyclopædia does not anticipate this obviously rational plan, but he paints a striking picture of the thousand abuses and miserable inefficiencies of the practice of *corvées*, and his piece illustrates that vigorous discussion of social subjects which the Encyclopædia stimulated. It is worth remarking that this writer was a sub-engineer of roads and bridges in the generality of Tours. The case is one example among others of the importance of the Encyclopædia as a centre, to which active-minded men of all kinds might bring the fruits of their thought and observation.

Next to the *corvées*, the monster grievance of the third estate was the system of enrolments for the militia. The article, *Milice*, is very short, but it goes to the root of the matter. The only son of a cultivator of moderate means, forced to quit the paternal roof at the moment when his labour might recompense his straitened parents for the expense of having brought him up, is justly described as an irreparable loss. The writer, after hinting that it would be well if such an institution were wholly dispensed with, urges that at least its object might be more effectively and more humanely reached by allowing each parish to provide its due contingent of men in its own way. This change was indeed already (1765) being carried out by Turgot in the Limousin, and with excellent results. The writer concludes with the highly

civilised remark, that we ought to weigh whether the good of the rural districts, the culture of the land, and population, are not preferable objects to the glory of setting enormous hosts of armed men on foot after the example of Xerxes. Alas, it is one of the discouragements of the student of history, that he often finds highly civilised remarks made one or two or twenty centuries ago, which are just as useful and just as little heeded now as they were when they were made.

The same reflection occurs to one in reading the article on Foundations. As I have already said, this carefully written and sagacious piece still remains the most masterly discussion we possess of the advantages and disadvantages of endowments. Even now, and in our own country, the most fertile and beneficent work to which a statesman of energy and courage could devote himself, would be an application of the wise principles which were established in the Encyclopædia. Passing from *Fondation* to *Foire* in the same volume, also from the pen of Turgot, we see an almost equally striking example of the economic wisdom of the encyclopædic school. The provincial fairs, with their privileges, exemptions, exclusions, were a conspicuous case of the mischief done by that "mania for regulating and guiding everything," which then infected commercial administration, and interrupted the natural course of trade by imbecile vexations of police. Another vicious example of the same principle is exposed in the article on *Maîtrises*. This must have convinced every reader capable of rising above "the holy laws of prejudice," how bad faith, idleness, disorder, and all the other evils of monopoly were fomented by a system of jealous trade-guilds, carrying compulsory subdivision and restriction of all kinds of skilled labour down to a degree that would have been laughable enough, if it had only been less destructive.

One of the loudest cries in 1789 was for the destruction of game and the great manorial chases or capitaineries. "By game," says Arthur Young,

"must be understood whole droves of wild boars, and herds of deer not confined by any wall or pale, but wandering at pleasure over the whole country to the destruction of crops, and to the peopling of the galleys by the wretched peasants who presumed to kill them, in order to save that food which was to support their helpless children."[165] In the same place he enumerates the outrageous and incredible rules which ruined agriculture over hundreds of leagues of country, in order that the seigneurs might have sport. In most matters the seven volumes of the Encyclopædia which were printed before 1757, are more reserved than the ten volumes which were conducted by Diderot alone after the great schism of 1759. On the subject of sport, however, the writer of the article *Chasse* enumerates all the considerations which a patriotic minister could desire to see impressed on public opinion. Some of the paragraphs startle us by their directness and freedom of complaint, and even a very cool reader would still be likely to feel some of the wrath that was stirred in the breast of our shrewd and sober Arthur Young a generation later (1787). "Go to the residence of these great nobles," he says, "wherever it may be, and you would probably find them in the midst of a forest, very well peopled with deer, wild boar, and wolves. Oh! if I were the legislator of France for a day, I would make such great lords skip!"[166]

This brings us to what is perhaps the most striking of all the guiding sentiments of the book. Virgil's Georgics have been described as a glorification of labour. The Encyclopædia seems inspired by the same motive, the same earnest enthusiasm for all the purposes, interests, and details of productive industry. Diderot, as has been justly said, himself the son of a cutler, might well bring handiwork into honour; assuredly he had inherited from his good father's workshop sympathy and regard for skill and labour.[167] The illustrative plates to which Diderot gave the most laborious attention for a period of almost thirty years, are not only

remarkable for their copiousness, their clearness, their finish — and in all these respects they are truly admirable — but they strike us even more by the semi-poetic feeling that transforms the mere representation of a process into an animated scene of human life, stirring the sympathy and touching the imagination of the onlooker as by something dramatic. The bustle, the dexterity, the alert force of the iron foundry, the glass furnace, the gunpowder mill, the silk calendry are as skilfully reproduced as the more tranquil toil of the dairywoman, the embroiderer, the confectioner, the setter of types, the compounder of drugs, the chaser of metals. The drawings recall that eager and personal interest in his work, that nimble complacency, which is so charming a trait in the best French craftsman. The animation of these great folios of plates is prodigious. They affect one like looking down on the world of Paris from the heights of Montmartre. To turn over volume after volume is like watching a splendid panorama of all the busy life of the time. Minute care is as striking in them as their comprehensiveness. The smallest tool, the knot in a thread, the ply in a cord, the curve of wrist or finger, each has special and proper delineation. The reader smiles at a complete and elaborate set of tailor's patterns. He shudders as he comes upon the knives, the probes, the bandages, the posture, of the wretch about to undergo the most dangerous operation in surgery. In all the chief departments of industry there are plates good enough to serve for practical specifications and working drawings. It has often been told how Diderot himself used to visit the workshops, to watch the men at work, to put a thousand questions, to sit down at the loom, to have the machine pulled to pieces and set together again before his eyes, to slave like any apprentice, and to do bad work, in order, as he says, to be able to instruct others how to do good work. That was no movement of empty rhetoric which made him cry out for the Encyclopædia to become a sanctuary in which human knowledge might find shelter against time and revolutions. He actually took

the pains to make it a complete storehouse of the arts, so perfect in detail that they could be at once reconstructed after a deluge in which everything had perished save a single copy of the Encyclopædia. Such details, said D'Alembert, will perhaps seem extremely out of place to certain scholars, for whom a long dissertation on the cookery or the hair-dressing of the ancients, or on the site of a ruined hamlet, or on the baptismal name of some obscure writer of the tenth century, would be vastly interesting and precious. He suggests that details of economy, and of arts and trades, have as good a right to a place as the scholastic philosophy, or some system of rhetoric still in use, or the mysteries of heraldry. Yet none even of these had been passed over.[168]

The importance given to physical science and the practical arts, in the Encyclopædia, is the sign and exemplification of two elements of the great modern transition. It marks both a social and an intellectual revolution. We see in it, first, the distinct association with pacific labour, of honour and a kind of glory, such as had hitherto been reserved for knights and friars, for war and asceticism, for fighting and praying.

It is the definite recognition of the basis of a new society. If the nobles and the churchmen could only have understood, as clearly as Diderot and D'Alembert understood, the irresistible forces that were making against the maintenance of the worn-out system, all the worst of the evils attending the great political changes of the last decade of the century would have been avoided. That the nobles and churchmen would not see this, was the fatality of the Revolution. We have a glimpse of the profound transformation of social ideas which was at work in the five or six lines of the article, *Journalier*. "Journeyman — a workman who labours with his hands, and is paid day-wages. This description of men forms the great part of a nation; it is their lot which a good government ought to keep principally in sight. If the journeyman is miserable, the nation is miserable." And again: "The net

profit of a society, if equally distributed, may be preferable to a larger profit, if it be distributed unequally, and have the effect of dividing the people into two classes, one gorged with riches, the other perishing in misery" (*Homme*).

The second element in the modern transition is only the intellectual side of the first. It is the substitution of interest in things for interest in words, of positive knowledge for verbal disputation. Few now dispute the services of the schoolmen to the intellectual development of Europe. But conditions had fully ripened, and it was time to complete the movement of Bacon and Descartes by finally placing verbal analysis, verbal definition, verbal inferences, in their right position. Form was no longer to take precedence of matter. The Encyclopædists are never weary of contrasting their own age of practical rationalism with "the pusillanimous ages of taste." A great collection of books is described in one article (*Bibliomanie*) as a collection of material for the history of the blindness and infatuation of mankind. The gatherer of books is compared to one who should place five or six gems under a pile of common pebbles. If a man of sense buys a work in a dozen volumes, and finds that only half a dozen pages are worth reading, he does well to cut out the half dozen pages and fling the rest into the fire. Finally, it would be no unbecoming device for every great library to have inscribed over its portal, The Bedlam of the Human Mind. At this point one might perhaps suggest to D'Alembert that study of the pathology of the mind is no bad means of surprising the secrets of humanity and life. For his hour, however, the need was not knowledge of the thoughts, dreams, and mental methods of the past, but better mastery of the aids and instruments of active life. In any case Diderot was right when he expressed his preference for the essay over the treatise: "an essay where the writer throws me one or two ideas of genius, almost isolated, rather than a treatise where the precious gems are stifled beneath a mass of iteration.... A man had only one idea; the

idea demanded no more than a phrase; this phrase, full of marrow and meaning, would have been seized with relish; washed out in a deluge of words, it wearies and disgusts."[169] Rousseau himself does not surpass Diderot or D'Alembert in contempt for mere bookishness. We wholly misjudge the Encyclopædia, if we treat it either as literature or philosophy.

The attitude of the Encyclopædia to religion is almost universally misrepresented in the common accounts. We are always told that the aim of its conductors was to preach dogmatic atheism. Such a statement could not be made by any one who had read the theological articles, whether the more or the less important among them. Whether Diderot had himself advanced definitely to the dogma of atheism at this time or not, it is certain that the Encyclopædia represents only the phase of rationalistic scepticism. That the criticism was destructive of much of the fabric of popular belief, and was designed to destroy it, is undeniable, as it was inevitable. But when the excesses of '93 and '94 — and all the revolutionary excesses put together are but a drop compared with the oceans of bloodshed with which Catholicism and absolutism have made history crimson — when the crimes and confusion of the end of the century are traced by historians to the materialism and atheism of the Encyclopædia, we can only say that such an account is a misrepresentation. The materialism and atheism are not there. The religious attack was prompted and guided by the same social feeling that inspired the economic articles. The priest was the enemy of society, the patron of indolence, the hater of knowledge, the mutineer against the civil laws, the unprofitable devourer of the national substance, the persecutor. Sacerdotalism is the object of the encyclopædic attack. To undermine this, it was necessary first to establish the principle of toleration, because the priest claims to be recognised as the exclusive possessor of saving doctrine. Second, it was necessary to destroy the principle of miracle, because the priest professes himself in his daily rites the consecrated instrument of

thaumaturgy. “Let a man,” says Rosenkranz very truly, “turn over hundreds of histories of church, of state, of literature, and in every one of them he will read that the Encyclopædia spread abroad an irreligious spirit. The accusation has only a relative truth, to the extent that the Encyclopædia assailed the belief in miracles, and the oppression of conscience supported by a priestly aristocracy.”[170]

It must be admitted that no consistent and definite language is adhered to from beginning to end. D’Alembert’s prophecy that time would disclose to people what the writers really thought, behind what fear of the censorship compelled them to say, is only partially fulfilled.

The idea of miracle is sapped not by direct arguments, but by the indirect influences of science, and the exposition of the successes of scientific method. It was here that the Encyclopædia exerted really destructive power, and it did so in the only way in which power of that kind can be exerted either wisely or effectually. The miracle of a divine revelation, of grace, of the mass, began to wear a different look in men’s eyes, as they learned more of the physical processes of the universe. We should describe the work of the Encyclopædia as being to make its readers lose their interest, rather than their belief, in mysteries. This is the normal process of theological dissolution. It unfolded a vast number of scientific conceptions in all branches of human activity, a surprising series of acquisitions, a vivid panorama of victories won by the ingenuity and travail of man. A contemplation of the wonders that man had wrought for himself, replaced meditation on the wonders that were alleged to have been wrought by the gods. The latter were not so much denied by the plain reader, as they were gradually left out of sight and forgotten. Nobody now cares to disprove Jupiter and Juno, Satyrs and Hamadryads.

Diderot constantly insists on the propriety, the importance, the indispensableness of keeping the provinces of science and philosophy apart

from the province of theology. This separation is much sought in our own day as a means of saving theology. Diderot designed it to save philosophy. He felt that the distinct recognition of positive thought as supreme within the widest limits then covered by it, would ultimately lead to the banishment of theological thought to a region of its own, too distant and too infertile for men to weary themselves in pursuit of it. His conception was to supplant the old ways of thinking and the old objects of intellectual interest by new ones. He trusted to the intrinsic fitness and value of the new knowledge and new views of human life, to displace the old. This marks him for a constructive thinker. He replaced barren theological interests that had outlived their time, by all those great groups of living and fruitful interests which glow and sparkle in the volumes of the Encyclopædia. Here was the effective damage that the Encyclopædia inflicted on the church as the organ of a stationary superstition. Some of the articles remind us on what a strange borderland France stood in those days, between debasing credulity and wholesome light. We are so sensible of the new air that breathes impalpably over the book, that when the old theological fancies appear for form's sake, and are solemnly marshalled in orthodox state, the contrast and the incongruity are so marked that one is amused by what looks like a subtle irony, mocking the censor under his very eyes. Who can help smiling at the grave question, *Adam, le premier de tous les hommes, a-t-il été philosophe?* Such disputes as whether it is proper to baptize abortions, ceased to interest a public that had begun to educate itself by discussions on the virtue of Inoculation.

Of the gross defects in the execution of the Encyclopædia nobody was so sensible as Diderot himself. He drew up a truly formidable list of the departments where the work was badly done.[171] But when the blunders and omissions in each subject were all counted, the value of the vast grouping of the subjects was hardly diminished. The union of all these secular

acquisitions in a single colossal work invested them with something imposing. Secular knowledge was made to present a massive and sumptuous front. It was pictured before the curious eyes of that generation as a great city of glittering palaces and stately mansions; or else as an immense landscape, with mountains, plains, rocks, waters, forests, animals, and a thousand objects, glorious and beautiful in the sunlight. Theology became visibly a shrivelled thing. Men grew to be conscious of the vastness of the universe. At the same time and by the same process the Encyclopædia gave them a key to the plan, a guiding thread in the immense labyrinth. The genealogical tree, or classification of arts and sciences, which with a few modifications was borrowed from Bacon and appeared at the end of the Prospectus, is seen to be faulty and inadequate. It distributes the various branches of knowledge with reference to faculties of the human understanding, instead of grouping them according to their objective relations to one another. This led to many awkward results, as when the art of printing is placed by the side of orthography as a subdivision of Logic, to which also is given the art of heraldry or emblazonment. There is awkwardness too in dividing architecture into three heads, and then placing civil architecture under national jurisprudence, and naval architecture under social jurisprudence, while under fine arts no kind of architecture has any place. But when we have multiplied these objections to the uttermost, the effect of the magnificence and vastness of the scheme remains exactly what it was.

Even more important than the exposition of human knowledge was the exposition of the degrees by which it had been slowly reared. The Preliminary Discourse to the Encyclopædia, of which by far the greater and more valuable portion was written by D'Alembert, contains a fine survey of the progress of science, thought, and letters since the revival of learning. It is a generous canonisation of the great heroes of secular knowledge. It is

rapid, but the contributions of Bacon, Descartes, Newton, Locke, Leibnitz are thrown into a series that penetrates the reader's mind with the idea of ordered growth and measured progress. This excited a vivid hopefulness of interest, which insensibly but most effectually pressed the sterile propositions of dogmatic theology into a dim and squalid background. Nor was this all. The Preliminary Discourse and the host of articles marshalled behind it, showed that the triumphs of knowledge and true opinion had all been gained on two conditions. The first of these conditions was a firm disregard of authority; the second was an abstention from the premature concoction of system. The reign of ignorance and prejudice was made inveterate by deference to tradition: the reign of truth was hindered by the artificial boundary-marks set mischievously deep by the authors of systems. As the whole spirit of theology is both essentially authoritative and essentially systematic, this disparagement was full of tolerably direct significance. It told in another way. The Sorbonne, the universities, the doctors, had identified orthodoxy with Cartesianism. "It is hard to believe," says D'Alembert in 1750, "that it is only within the last thirty years that people have even begun to renounce Cartesianism." He might have added that one of the most powerful of his contemporaries, Montesquieu himself, remained a rigid Cartesian to the end of his days. "Our nation," he says, "singularly eager as it is for novelties in all matters of taste, is in matters of science extremely attached to old opinions." This remark remains true of France to the present hour, and it would be an interesting digression, did time allow, to consider its significance. France can at all events count one master innovator, the founder of Cartesianism himself. D'Alembert points out that the disciples violate the first maxims of their chief. He describes the hypothesis of vortices and the doctrine of innate ideas as no longer tenable, and even as ridiculous; but do not let us forget, he says with a fine movement of candour, that it was Descartes who opened the way; he who

set an example to men of intelligence, of shaking off the yoke of scholasticism, of opinion, of authority — in a word, of prejudices and barbarism. Those who remain faithful to his hypothetical system, while they abandon his method, may be the last of his partisans, but they would assuredly never have been the first of his disciples.

By system the Encyclopædists meant more or less coherent bodies of frivolous conjecture. The true merit of the philosopher or the physicist is described as being to have the spirit of system, yet never to construct a system. The notion expressed in this sentence promises a union of the advantages of an organic synthesis, with the advantages of an open mind and unfettered inquiry. It would be ridiculous to think, says D'Alembert, that there is nothing more to discover in anatomy, because anatomists devote themselves to researches that may seem to be of no use, and yet often prove to be full of use in their consequences. Nor would it be less absurd to lay a ban on erudition, on the pretext that our learned men often give themselves up to matters of trivial import.

We are constantly struck in the Encyclopædia by a genuine desire to reach the best opinion by the only right way, the way of abundant, many-sided, and liberal discussion. The article, for instance, on *Fermes Générales* contains an examination of the question whether it is more expedient that the taxes of a nation should be gathered by farmers of the revenue, or directly by the agents of the government acting on its behalf and under its supervision. Montesquieu had argued strongly in favour of a *Régie*, the second of these methods. The writer of the article sets out the nine considerations by which Montesquieu had endeavoured to establish his position, and then he offers on each of them the strongest observations that occur to him in support of the opposite conclusion. At the conclusion of the article, the editors of the Encyclopædia append the following note: "Our professed impartiality and our desire to promote the discussion and clearing

up of an important question, have induced us to insert this article. As the Encyclopædia has for its principal aim the public advantage and instruction, we will insert in the article, *Régie*, without taking any side, all such reasons for and against, as people may he willing to submit to us, provided they are stated with due sense and moderation." Alas, when we turn to the article on *Régie*, the promise is unfulfilled, and a dozen meagre lines disappoint the seeker. But eight years of storm had passed, and many a beneficent intention had been wrecked. The announcement at least shows us the aim and spirit of the original scheme.

Of the line of argument taken in the Encyclopædia as to Toleration we need say nothing. The Encyclopædists were the most ardent propagators of the modern principles of tolerance. No one has to be reminded that this was something more than an abstract discussion among the doctors of social philosophy, in a country where youths were broken on the wheel for levity in face of an ecclesiastical procession, where nearly every considerable man of the century had been either banished or imprisoned for daring to use his mind, and which had been half ruined by the great proscription of Protestants more than once renewed. The article *Tolérance* was greatly admired in its day, and it is an eloquent and earnest reproduction of the pleas of Locke. One rather curious feature in it is the reproduction of the passage from the Social Contract, in which Rousseau explains the right of the magistrate to banish any citizen who has not got religion enough to make him do his duties, and who will not make a profession of civil faith. The writer of the article interprets this as implying that "atheists in particular, who remove from the powerful the only rein, and from the weak their only hope," have no right to claim toleration. This is an unexpected stroke in a work that is vulgarly supposed to be a violent manifesto on behalf of atheism.[172]

Diderot himself in an earlier article (*Intolérance*) had treated the subject with more trenchant energy. He does not argue his points systematically, but launches a series of maxims, as with set teeth, clenched hands, and a brow like a thundercloud. He hails the oppressors of his life, the priests and the parliaments, with a pungency that is exhilarating, and winds up with a description of the intolerant as one who forgets that a man is his fellow, and for holding a different opinion, treats him like a ravening brute; as one who sacrifices the spirit and precepts of his religion to his pride; as the rash fool who thinks that the arch can only be upheld by his hands; as a man who is generally without religion, and to whom it comes easier to have zeal than morals. Every page of the Encyclopædia was, in fact, a plea for toleration. This embittered the hostility of the churchmen to the work more than its attack upon dogma. For most ecclesiastics valued power more dearly than truth. And in power they valued most dearly the atrocious right of silencing, by foul means or fair, all opinions that were not official.

III.

Having thus described the general character and purport of the Encyclopædia, we have still to look at a special portion of it from a more particular point of view. We have already shown how multifarious were Diderot's labours as editor. It remains to give a short account of his labours as a contributor. Everything was on the same vast scale. His industry in writing would have been in itself most astonishing, even if it had not been accompanied by the more depressing fatigue of revising what others had written. Diderot's articles fill more than four of the large volumes of his collected works.

The confusion is immense. The spirit is sometimes historical, sometimes controversial; now critical, now dogmatic. In one place Diderot speaks in his own proper person, in another as the neutral scribe writing to the

dictation of an unseen authority. There is no rigorous measure and ordered proportion. We constantly pass from a serious treatise to a sally, from an elaborate history to a caprice. There are not a few pages where we know that Diderot is saying what he does not think. Some of the articles seem only to have found a place because Diderot happened to have taken an interest in their subjects at the moment. After reading Voltaire's concise account of Imagination, we are amazed to find Diderot devoting a larger space than Voltaire had needed for the subject at large, to so subordinate and remote a branch of the matter as the Power of the Imagination in Pregnant Women upon the Unborn Young. The article on Theosophs would hardly have been so disproportionately long as it is, merely for the sake of Paracelsus and Van Helmont and Poiret and the Rosicrucians, unless Diderot happened to be curiously and half-sympathetically brooding over the mixture of inspiration and madness, of charlatanry and generous aim, of which these semi-mystic, semi-scientific characters were composed.[173]

Many of Diderot's articles, again, have no rightful place in an Encyclopædia. *Genius*, for instance, is dealt with in what is neither more nor less than a literary essay, vigorous, suggestive, diffuse; and containing, by the way, the curious assertion that, although there are few errors in Locke and too few truths in Shaftesbury, yet Locke is only an acute and comprehensive intelligence, while Shaftesbury is a genius of the first order.

Under the word *Laborious*, we have only a dozen lines of angry reproach against the despotism that makes men idle by making property uncertain. Under such words as *Frivolous*, *Gallantry*, *Perfection*, *Importance*, *Politeness*, *Melancholy*, *Glorieux*, the reader is amused and edified by miniature essays on manners and character, seldom ending without some pithy sentence and pointed moral. Sometimes (e.g. *Grandeur*) we have a charming piece after the manner of La Bruyère. Under the verb *Naître*,

which is placed in the department of grammar, we find a passage so far removed from grammar as the following: —

"The terms of life and death have nothing absolute; they only designate the successive states of one and the same being; for him who has been strongly nourished in this philosophy, the urn that contains the ashes of a father, a mother, a husband, a mistress, is truly a touching object. There still remains in it life and warmth; these ashes may perhaps even yet feel our tears and give them response; who knows if the movement that our tears stir, as they water those ashes, is wholly without sensibility?"

This little burst of grotesque sentimentalism is one of the pieces that justify the description of Diderot as the most German of all the French.[174] Equally characteristic and more sensible is the writer's outbreak against Formalists. "The formalist knows exactly the proper interval between receiving and returning a visit; he expects you on the exact day at the exact time; if you fail, he thinks himself neglected and takes offence. A single man of this stamp is enough to chill and embarrass a whole company. There is nothing so repugnant to simple and upright souls as formalities; as such people have within themselves the consciousness of the good-will they bear to everybody, they neither plague themselves to be constantly displaying a sentiment that is habitual, nor to be constantly on the watch for it in others." This is analogous to his contempt for the pedants who object to the use of a hybrid word: "If it happens that a composite of a Greek word and a Latin word renders the idea as well, and is easier to pronounce or pleasanter to the ear than a compound of two Greek words and two Latin words, why prefer the latter?" (*Hibrides*). Some articles are simply diatribes against the enemy. *Pardon*, for instance: "It needs much attention, much modesty, much skill to wring from others pardon for our superiority. The men who have executed a foolish work, have never been able to pardon us for projecting a better. We could have got from them pardon for a crime, but never for a good action."

And so forth, with much magnanimous acrimony. *Prostitution* is only introduced for the pleasure of applying the unsavoury word to certain critics "of whom we have so many in these days, and of whom we say that they prostitute their pens to money, to favour, to lying, and to all the vices most unworthy of an honourable man."

We are constantly being puzzled and diverted by Diderot's ingenuity in wandering away from the topic nominally in hand, to insinuate some of those doctrines of tolerance, of suspended judgment, or of liberty, which lay so much nearer to his heart than any point of mere erudition. There is a little article on Aius-Locutius, the Announcing Speaker, one of the minor Roman gods. Diderot begins by a few lines describing the rise of the deity into repute. He then quotes Cicero's pleasantry on the friendly divinity, that when nobody in the world had ever heard of him, he delivered a salutary oracle, but after people had built him a fine temple, then the god of speech fell dumb. This suggests to Diderot to wonder with edifying innocence how so religious a people as the Romans endured these irreverent jests in their philosophers. By an easy step we pass to the conditions on which modern philosophers should be allowed by authority to publish their speculations. Diderot throws out the curious hint that it would be best to forbid any writing against government and religion in the vulgar tongue, and to allow those who write in a learned tongue to publish what they please. And so we bid farewell to Aius-Locutius. In passing, we ask ourselves whether Diderot's suggestion is not available in the discussion of certain questions, where freedom of speech in the vernacular tongue is scarcely compatible with the *reverentia quæ debetur pueris*?

Diderot is never prevented by any mistaken sense of the dignity of his enterprise from interspersing his disquisitions on science and philosophy with such practical thoughts on the common matters of daily life as come into his ingenious head. He suggests, for instance, by way of preventing the

frauds of cab-drivers on their masters and on the public, that all payments of fares should be made to appointed officers at the various cab-stations, and that no driver should take up a fare except at one of these stations.[175] In writing about lackeys, after a word on their insolence and on the wretched case in which most of them end their days, he points out that the multitude of them is causing the depopulation of the fields. They are countrymen who have thronged to Paris to avoid military service. Peasants turned lackeys to escape the conscription, just as in our own days they turn priests. Then, says Diderot, this evil ought to be checked by a tax upon liveries; but such a tax is far too sensible ever to be imposed.

Yet, notwithstanding the practical and fervid temper of his understanding, Diderot is not above literary trifling when the humour seizes him. If he can write an exhaustive article on Encyclopædia, or Spinosa, or Academies, or Weaving, he can also stoop to Anagrams, and can tell us that the letters of Frère Jacques Clément, the assassin of Henry III., make up the sinister words, *C'est l'enfer qui m'a créé*. He can write a couple of amusing pages on Onomatomancy, or divination of a man's fortune from his name; and can record with neutral gravity how frequently great empires have been destroyed under princes bearing the same name as their first founders; how, again, certain names are unlucky for princes, as Cains among the Romans, John in France, England, and Scotland, and Henry in France.

We have now and then an anecdote that is worth reading and worth preserving. Thus, under Machiavellist: "I have heard that a philosopher, being asked by a great prince about a refutation of Machiavellism, which the latter had just published, replied, 'Sire, I fancy that the first lesson that Machiavelli would have given to his disciple would have been to refute his work.'" Whether Voltaire ever did say this to the great Frederick, is very questionable, but it would not have been ill said. After the reader has been taken through a short course of Arabian philosophy, he is enlivened by a

selection of poetic sayings about human life from the Rose-garden of Sadi, and the whole article winds up with an eastern fable, of no particular relevancy, of three men finding a treasure, and of one of them poisoning the food for which the other two had sent him; on his return they suddenly fell on him and slew him, and then ate the poisoned food, and so the treasure fell to none of them.[176]

We have spoken in the previous section of the contempt expressed by D'Alembert for mere literary antiquarianism — a very different thing, let us remember, from scientific inquiry into the origin and classification of institutions and social organs. Diderot's article on the Germans is an excellent illustration of this wholesome predominance of the scientific spirit over the superficialities of barren erudition. The word "Allemand," says Diderot, "has a great many etymologies, but they are so forced, that it is almost as well to know none of them, as to know them all. As for the origin of this famous stock, all that has been said on that matter, between Tacitus and Clovis, is simply a tissue of guesses without foundation." Of course in this some persons will see a shameful levity; others will regard it as showing very good sense, and a right estimate of what is knowable and worth knowing, and what is neither one nor the other. In the article on Celibacy we notice the same temper. A few sentences are enough for the antiquarianism of the subject, what the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans thought and ordained about celibacy. The substance of the article is a reproduction of the Abbé Saint Pierre's discussion of the advantages that would be gained for France, with her declining population, if her forty thousand curés were allowed to marry, and to bring into the world eighty thousand children. We may believe that Diderot smiled as he transcribed the Abbé's cunning suggestion that a dispensing power to relieve from the obligation of celibacy should be recognised in the Pope, and that the Roman court should receive a sum of money for every dispensation so granted.

Although, however, Diderot despised mere bookishness, his article on Libraries is one of the longest and most painstaking, furnishing a tolerably complete list of the most famous collections, from the beginning of books down to the latest additions to the King's Library in the Rue Vivienne. In the course of this article he quotes with seeming approval the quaint words in which old Richard of Bury, the author of the *Philobiblon* (1340), praised books as the best of masters, much as the immortal defender of the poet Archias had praised them: "Hi sunt magistri qui nos instruunt sine virgis et ferulis, sine cholera, sine pecuniâ; si accedis non dormiunt; si inquiris non se abscondunt; non obmurmurant si oberres; cachinnos nesciunt si ignores."

In literature proper, as in philosophy, Diderot loses no opportunity of insisting on the need of being content with suspended judgment. For instance, he blames historians of opinion for the readiness with which they attribute notions found in one or two rabbis to the whole of the Jews, or because two or three Fathers say something, boldly set this down as the sentiments of a whole century, although perhaps we have nothing else save these two or three Fathers left of the century, and although we do not know whether their writings were applauded, or were even widely known. "It were to be wished that people should speak less affirmatively, especially on particular points and remote consequences, and that they should only attribute them directly to those in whose writings they are actually to be found. I confess that the history of the sentiments of antiquity would not seem so complete, and that it would be necessary to speak in terms of doubt much more often than is common; but by acting otherwise we expose ourselves to the danger of taking false and uncertain conjectures for ascertained and unquestionable truths. The ordinary man of letters does not readily put up with suspensive expressions, any more than common people do so." All this is an odd digression to be found under the head of Hylopathianism, but it must always remain wholesome doctrine.

We cannot wonder at Diderot's admiration for Montaigne and for Bayle, who, with Hume, would make the great trinity of scepticism. "The work of Montaigne," said Diderot, "is the touchstone of a good intelligence; you may be sure that any one whom the reading of Montaigne displeases has some vice either of heart or understanding. As for Bayle, he has had few equals in the art of reasoning, and perhaps no superior; and though he piles doubt upon doubt, he always proceeds with order; an article of his is a living polypus, which divides itself into a number of polypuses, all living, engendered one from the other."[177] Yet Diderot had a feeling of the necessity of advancing beyond the attitude of Bayle and Montaigne. Intellectual suspense and doubt was made difficult to him by his vehement and positive demand for emotional certainties.

Diderot is always ready to fling away his proper subject in a burst of moralising. The article on *Man*, as a branch of natural history, contains a correct if a rather superficial account of that curious animal; at length the writer comes to a table showing the probable duration of life at certain ages. "You will observe," he says, "1st, that the age of seven is that at which you may hope a longer life; 2d, that at twelve or thirteen you have lived a quarter of your life; at twenty-eight or twenty-nine you have lived half; at fifty more than three-quarters." And then he suddenly winds up the whole performance by the exclamation: "O ye who have laboured up to fifty, who are in the enjoyment of comfort, and who still have left to you health and strength, what then are you waiting for before you take rest? How long will you go on saying *To-morrow, to-morrow?*"

There are many casual brilliancies in the way of analogy and parallel, many aptnesses of thought and phrase. The Stoics are called the Jansenists of Paganism. "For a single blade of grass to grow, it is necessary that the whole of nature should co-operate." "A man comes to Pyrrhonism by one of

two opposite ways; either because he does not know enough, or because he knows too much; the latter is not the most common way." And so forth.

If we turn to the group of articles dealing with theology, it is difficult for us to know exactly where we are. Sometimes Diderot writes of popular superstitions with the gravity proper to a dictionary of mythology. Sometimes he sews on to the sober gray of his scepticism a purple patch of theistic declamation.[178] The article on Jesus Christ is obviously a mere piece of common form, and more than one passage in his article on *Christianisme* is undoubtedly insincere. When we come to his more careful article, *Providence*, we find it impossible to extract from it a body of coherent propositions of which we could confidently say that they represented his own creed, or the creed that he desired his readers to bear away in their minds.

It is hardly worth while to measure the more or the less of his adherence to Christianity, or even to Deism, as inferred from the Encyclopædia. We need only turn to his private letters to find that he is in no degree nor kind an adherent, but the most hardy, contemptuous, and thoroughgoing of opponents. At the risk of shocking devout persons, I am bound to reproduce a passage from one of his letters, in which there can be no doubt that we have Diderot's true mind, as distinguished from what it was convenient to print. "The Christian religion," he says, "is to my mind the most absurd and atrocious in its dogmas; the most unintelligible, the most metaphysical, the most intertwisted and obscure, and consequently the most subject to divisions, sects, schisms, heresies; the most mischievous for the public tranquillity, the most dangerous to sovereigns by its hierarchic order, its persecutions, its discipline; the most flat, the most dreary, the most Gothic, and the most gloomy in its ceremonies; the most puerile and unsociable in its morality, considered not in what is common to it with universal morality, but in what is peculiarly its own, and constitutes it evangelical, apostolical,

and Christian morality, which is the most intolerant of all. Lutheranism, freed from some absurdities, is preferable to Catholicism; Protestantism to Lutheranism, Socinianism to Protestantism, Deism, with temples and ceremonies, to Socinianism. Since it is necessary that man, being superstitious by nature, should have a fetish, the simplest and most harmless will be the best fetish."[179] We need not discuss nor extend the quotation; enough has been said to relieve us from the duty of analysing or criticising articles in which Christianity is treated with all the formal respect that the secular authority insisted upon.

This formal respect is not incompatible with many veiled and secret sarcasms, which were as well understood as they were sharply enjoyed by those who read between the lines. It is not surprising that these sarcasms were constantly unjust and shallow. Even those of us who repudiate theology and all its works for ourselves, may feel a shock at the coarseness and impurity of innuendo which now and then disfigures Diderot's treatment of theological as of some other subjects. For this the attitude of the Church itself was much to blame; coarse, virulent, unspiritual as it was in France in those days. Voltaire, Diderot, Holbach, would have written in a very different spirit, even while maintaining and publishing the same attacks on theological opinion, if the Church of France had possessed such a school of teachers as the Church of England found in the Latitudinarians in the seventeenth century; or such as she finds now in the nineteenth century in those who have imported, partly from the poetry of Wordsworth, partly from the historic references of the Oxford Tracts, an equity, a breadth, an elevation, a pensive grace, that effectually forbid the use of those more brutal weapons of controversy which were the only weapons possible in France a century ago.

We have already said so much of the great and important group of articles on arts and trades, that it is unnecessary to add anything further as

to Diderot's particular share in them. He visited all the workshops in Paris; he sent for information and specifications to the most important seats of manufacture in the kingdom; he sometimes summoned workmen from the provinces to describe to him the paper works of Montargis, and the silk works and velvet works of Lyons.[180] Much of Diderot's work, even on great practical subjects, was, no doubt, the reproduction of mere book-knowledge acquired at second-hand. Take, for instance, Agriculture, which was undoubtedly the most important of all subjects for France at that date, as indeed at every other date. There are a dozen pages of practical precepts, for which Diderot was probably indebted to one of the farmers at Grandval. After this, he fills up the article with about twenty pages in which he gives an account of the new system of husbandry, which our English Jethro Tull described to an unbelieving public between 1731 and 1751. Tull's volume was translated into French by Duhamel, with notes and the record of experiments of his own; from this volume Diderot drew the pith of his article. Diderot's only merit in the matter — and it is hardly an inconsiderable one in a world of routine — is that he should have been at the pains to seek the newest lights, and above all that he should have urged the value of fresh experiments in agriculture. Tull was not the safest authority in the world, but it is to be remembered that the shrewd-witted Cobbett thought his ideas on husbandry worth reproducing, seventy years after Diderot had thought them worth compiling into an article.

It was not merely in the details of the practical arts that Diderot wrote from material acquired at second-hand. The article on the Zend-Avesta is taken from the Annual Register for 1762. The long series of articles on the history of philosophy is in effect a reproduction of what he found in Bayle, in Deslandes, and in Brucker. There are one or two considerable exceptions. Perhaps the most important is under the heading of Spinosa, to which we shall return presently. The article on *Hobbisme* contains an analysis,

evidently made by the writer's own hand, of the bulk of Hobbes's propositions; it is scarcely, however, illuminated by a word of criticism. If we turn to the article on *Société*, it is true, we find Hobbes's view of the relations between the civil and temporal powers tolerably effectively combated, but even here Diderot hardly does more than arm himself with the weapons of Locke.

Of course, he honestly refers his readers to these sources of wider information.[181] All that we can say of the articles on the history of philosophy is that the series is very complete; that Diderot used his matter with intelligence and the spirit of criticism, and that he often throws in luminous remarks and far-reaching suggestions of his own. This was all that the purpose of his book required. To imitate the laborious literary search of Bayle or of Brucker, and to attempt to compile an independent history of philosophy, would have been to sacrifice the Encyclopædia as a whole, to the superfluous perfection of a minor part. There is only one imperative condition in such a case, namely, that the writer should pass the accepted material through his own mind before reproducing it. With this condition it was impossible for a man of Diderot's indefatigable energy of spirit, not as a rule to comply.

But this rule too had exceptions. There were cases in which he reproduced, as any mere bookmaker might have done, the thought of his authority, without an attempt to make it his own. Of the confusion and inequalities in which Diderot was landed by this method of mingling the thoughts of other people with his own, there is a curious example in the two articles on Philosopher and Philosophy. In the first we have an essentially social and practical description of what the philosopher should be; in the second we have a definition of philosophy, which takes us into the regions most remote from what is social and practical. We soar to the airiest heights of verbal analysis and pure formalism. Nothing can be better, so far as it

goes, than the picture of the philosopher. Diderot begins by contrasting him with the crowd of people, and clever people, who insist on passing judgment all day long. “They ignore the scope and limits of the human mind; they think it capable of knowing everything; hence they think it a disgrace not to pronounce judgment, and imagine that intelligence consists in that and nothing else. The philosopher believes that it consists in judging rightly. He is better pleased with himself when he has suspended his faculty of coming to a conclusion, than if he had come to a conclusion without the proper grounds. He prefers to brilliancy the pains of rightly distinguishing his ideas, of finding their true extent and exact connection. He is never so attached to a system as not to feel all the force of the objections to it. Most men are so strongly given over to their opinions that they do not take any trouble to make out those of others. The philosopher, on the other hand, understands what he rejects, with the same breadth and the same accuracy as he understands what he adopts.” Then Diderot turns characteristically from the intellectual to the social side. “Our philosopher does not count himself an exile in the world; he does not suppose himself in an enemy’s country; he would fain find pleasure with others, and to find it he must give it; he is a worthy man who wishes to please and to make himself useful. The ordinary philosophers who meditate too much, or rather who meditate to wrong purpose, are as surly and arrogant to all the world as great people are to those whom they do not think their equals; they flee men, and men avoid them. But our philosopher who knows how to divide himself between retreat and the commerce of men is full of humanity. *Civil society is, so to say, a divinity for him on the earth*; he honours it by his probity, by an exact attention to his duties, and by a sincere desire not to be a useless or an embarrassing member of it. The sage has the leaven of order and rule; he is full of the ideas connected with the good of civil society. What experience shows us every day is that the more reason and light people have, the better

fitted they are and the more to be relied on for the common intercourse of life."[182]

The transition is startling from this conception of

Philosopher as a very high kind of man of the world, to the definition of Philosophy as "the science of possibles quâ possibles." Diderot's own reflection comes back to us, *Combien cette maudite métaphysique fait des fous!*[183] We are abruptly plunged from a Baconian into a Leibnitzian atmosphere. We should naturally have expected some such account of Philosophy as that it begins with a limitation of the questions to which men can hope for an answer, and ends in an ordered arrangement of the principles of knowledge, with ultimate reference to the conditions of morals and the structure of civil societies. We should naturally have expected to find, what indeed we do find, that the characteristic of the philosopher is to "admit nothing without proof, never to acquiesce in illusory notions; to draw rigorously the dividing lines of the certain, the probable, the doubtful; above all things never to pay himself with mere words." But then these wholesome prescriptions come in an article whose definitions and distribution of philosophy are simply a reproduction from Christian Wolff, and the methods and dialect of Wolff are as essentially alien from the positive spirit of the Encyclopædia as they were from the mystic spirit of Jacobi.

Wolff's place in the philosophical succession of German speculation (1679-1754) is between Leibnitz and Kant, and until Kant came his system was dominant in the country of metaphysics.[184] It is from

Wolff that Diderot borrows and throws unassimilated into the pages of the Encyclopædia propositions so fundamentally incongruous as this, that "among all possibles there must of necessity be a Being subsisting by himself; otherwise there would be possible things, of the possibility of which no account could be given, an assertion that could never be made." It

is a curious thing, and it illustrates again the strangely miscellaneous quality of Diderot's compilation, that the very article which begins by this incorporation of the author of a philosophical system expounded in a score of quartos, ends by a vigorous denunciation of the introduction of the systematic spirit into philosophy.

I shall venture to quote a hardy passage from another article (*Pyrrhonienne*) which some will think a measure of Diderot's philosophical incompetency, and others will think a measure of his good sense. "We will conclude," he says, "for our part that as all in nature is bound together, there is nothing, properly speaking, of which man has perfect, absolute, and complete knowledge, because for that he would need knowledge of all. Now as all is bound together, it inevitably happens that, from discussion to discussion, he must come to something unknown: then in starting again from this unknown point, we shall be justified in pleading against him the ignorance or the obscurity or the uncertainty of the point preceding, and of that preceding this, and so forth, up to the most evident principle. So we must admit a sort of sobriety in the use of reason. When step by step I have brought a man to some evident proposition, I shall cease to dispute. I will listen no longer to a man who goes on to deny the existence of bodies, the rules of logic, the testimony of the senses, the difference between good and evil, true and false, etc. etc. I will turn my back on everybody who tries to lead me away from a simple question, to embark me in discussion as to the nature of matter, of the understanding of thought, and other subjects shoreless and bottomless."[185] Whatever else may be said of this, we have to recognise that it is exactly characteristic of the author. But then why have written on metaphysics at all?

We have mentioned the article on Spinosa. It is characteristic both of the good and the bad sides of Diderot's work. Half of it is merely a reproduction of Bayle's criticisms on Spinosa and his system. The other half

consists of original objections propounded by Diderot with marked vigour of thrust against Spinosa, but there is no evidence that he had gone deeper into Spinosa than the first book of the Ethics. There is no certain sign that he had read anything else, or that he had more of that before him than the extracts that were furnished by Bayle. Such treatment of a serious subject hardly conforms to the modern requirements of the literary conscience, for in truth the literary conscience has now turned specialist and shrinks from the encyclopædic. Diderot's objections are, as we have said, pushed with marked energy of speech. "However short away," he says, "you penetrate into the thick darkness in which Spinosa has wrapped himself up, you discover a succession of abysses into which this audacious reasoner has precipitated himself, of propositions either evidently false or evidently doubtful, of arbitrary principles, substituted for natural principles and sensible truths; an abuse of terms taken for the most part in a wrong sense, a mass of deceptive equivocations, a cloud of palpable contradictions." The system is monstrous, it is absurd and ridiculous. It is Spinosa's plausible method that has deceived people; they supposed that one who employed geometry, and proceeded by way of axioms and definitions, must be on the track of truth. They did not see that these axioms were nothing better than very vague and very uncertain propositions; that the definitions were inexact, defective, and bizarre.

We have no space to follow the reasoning by which Diderot supports this scornful estimate of the famous thinker, of whom it can never be settled whether he be pantheist, atheist, akosmist, or God-intoxicated man. He returns to the charge again and again, as if he felt a certain secret uneasiness lest for scorn so loudly expressed he had not brought forward adequate justification. And the reader feels that Diderot has scarcely hit the true line of cleavage that would have enabled him — from his own point of view — to shatter the Spinosist system. He tries various bouts of logic with Spinosa

in connection with detached propositions. Thus he deals with Spinosa's third proposition, that, *in the case of things that have nothing in common with one another, one cannot be the cause of the other*. This proposition, Diderot contends, is false in all moral and occasional causes. The sound of the name of God has nothing in common with the idea of the Creator which that name produces in my mind. A misfortune that overtakes my friend has nothing in common with the grief that I feel in consequence. When I move my arm by an act of will, the movement has nothing in common in its nature with the act of my will; they are very different. I am not a triangle, yet I form the idea of one and I examine its properties. So with the fifth proposition, that *there cannot be in the universe two or more substances of the same nature or the same attributes*. If Spinosa is only talking of the essence of things or of their definition, what he says is naught; for it can only mean that there cannot be in the universe two different essences having the same essence. Who doubts it? But if Spinosa means that there cannot be an essence which is found in various single objects, in the same way as the essence of triangle is found in the triangle A and the triangle B, then he says what is manifestly untrue. It is not, however, until the last two or three pages that Diderot sets forth his dissent in its widest form.

"To refute Spinosa," he says at last, "all that is necessary is to stop him at the first step, without taking the trouble to follow him into a mass of consequences; all that we need do is to substitute for the obscure principle which he makes the base of his system, the following: namely, that *there are several substances* — a principle that in its own way is clear to the last degree. And, in fact, what proposition can be clearer, more striking, more close to the understanding and consciousness of man? I here seek no other judge than the most just impression of the common sense that is spread among the human race.... Now, since common sense revolts against each of Spinosa's propositions, no less than against the first, of which they are the

pretended proofs, instead of stopping to reason on each of these proofs where common sense is lost, we should be right to say to him: — Your principle is contrary to common sense; from a principle in which common sense is lost, nothing can issue in which common sense is to be found again."

The passage sounds unpleasantly like an appeal to the crowd in a matter of science, which is as the sin against the Holy Ghost in these high concerns. What Diderot meant, probably, was to charge Spinosa with inventing a conception of substance which has no relation to objective experience; and further with giving fantastic answers to questions that were in themselves never worth asking, because the answers must always involve a violent wrench of the terms of experience into the sphere transcending experience, and because, moreover, they can never be verified. Whether he meant this or something else, and whether he would have been right or wrong in such an intention, we may admit that it would have been more satisfactory if in dealing with such a master-type of the metaphysical method as Spinosa, so acute a positive critic as Diderot had taken more pains to give to his objections the utmost breadth of which they were capable.[186]

The article on Leibnitz has less original matter in it than that on Spinosa. The various speculations of that great and energetic intellect in metaphysic, logic, natural theology, natural law, are merely drawn out in a long table of succinct propositions, while the account of the life and character of Leibnitz is simply taken from the excellent *éloge* which had been published upon him by Fontenelle in 1716. Fontenelle's narrative is reproduced in a generous spirit of admiration and respect for a genius that was like Diderot's own in encyclopædic variety of interest, while it was so far superior to Diderot's in concentration, in subtlety, in precision, in power of construction. If there could exist over our heads, says Diderot, a species of

beings who could observe our works as we watch those of creatures at our feet, with what surprise would such beings have seen those four marvellous insects, Bayle, Descartes, Leibnitz, and Newton. And he then draws up a little calendar of the famous men, out of whom we must choose the name to be placed at the very head of the human race. The list contains, besides Julian the Apostate — who was inserted, we may presume, merely by way of playful insult to the ecclesiastical enemy — Socrates, Marcus Aurelius, Trajan, Bacon, and the four great names that have just been cited. Germany derives as much honour from Leibnitz alone, he concludes with unconsidered enthusiasm, as Greece from Plato, Aristotle, and Archimedes, all put together. As we have said, however, there is no criticism, nor any other sign that Diderot had done more than survey the façade of the great Leibnitzian structure admiringly from without.

The article on Liberty would be extremely remarkable, appearing where it does, and coming from a thinker of Diderot's general capacity, if only we could be sure that Diderot was sincere. As it happens, there is good reason to suppose that he was wholly insincere. It is quite as shallow, from the point of view of philosophy, as his article on the Jews or on the Bible is from the point of view of erudition. One reason for this might not be far to seek. We have repeatedly observed how paramount the social aim and the social test are in Diderot's mind over all other considerations. But this reference of all subjects of discussion to the good of society, and this measurement of conclusions by their presumed effect on society, is a method that has its own dangers. The aversion of ecclesiastics to unfettered discussion, lest it should damage institutions and beliefs deemed useful to mankind, is the great leading example of this peril. Diderot, it might be said by those who should contend that he wrote what he thought, did not escape exactly the same predicament, as soon as ever he forgot that of all the things that are good for society, Truth is the best. Now, who will believe that it is

Diderot, the persecuted editor of the Encyclopædia, and the author of the manly article on Intolerance, who introduces such a passage as the following into the discussion of the everlasting controversy of Free Will and Necessity: “Take away Liberty, and you leave no more vice nor virtue nor merit in the world; rewards are ridiculous, and punishments unjust. The ruin of Liberty overthrows all order and all police, confounds vice and virtue, authorises every monstrous infamy, extinguishes the last spark of shame and remorse, degrades and disfigures beyond recovery the whole human race. *A doctrine of such enormity as this ought not to be examined in the schools; it ought to be punished by the magistrates.*”[187] Of course, this was exactly what the Jesuits said about a belief in God, about revelation, and about the institutions of the church. To take away these, they said, is to throw down the bulwarks of order, and an attempt to take them away, as by encyclopædists or others, ought to be punished by the magistrates. Diderot had for the moment clearly lost himself.

We need hardly be surprised if an article conceived in this spirit contains no serious contribution to the difficult question with which it deals. Diderot had persuaded himself that, without Free Will, all those emotional moralities in the way of sympathy and benevolence and justice which he adored would be lowered to the level of mere mechanism. “If men are not free in what they do of good and evil, then,” he cries, in what is surely a paroxysm of unreason, “good is no longer good, and evil no longer evil.” As if the outward quality and effects of good and evil were not independent of the mental operations which precede human action. Murder would not cease to be an evil simply because it had been proved that the murderer’s will to do a bad deed was the result of antecedents. Acts have marks and consequences of their own, good or bad, whatever may be the state of mind of those who do them. But Diderot does not seem to divine the true issue; he writes as if Necessarians or Determinists denied the existence of

volitions, and as if the question were whether volitions do exist. Nobody denies that they exist; the real question is of the conditions under which they exist. Are they determined by antecedents, or are they self-determined, spontaneous, and unconnected? Is Will independent of cause?

Diderot's argumentation is, in fact, merely a protest that man is conscious of a Will. And just as in other parts of his article Diderot by Liberty means only the existence of Will, so by Liberty he means only the healthy condition of the soul, and not its independence of causation. We need not waste words on so dire a confusion, nor on the theory that Will is sometimes dependent on cerebral antecedents and sometimes not. The curious thing is that the writer should not have perceived that he was himself in this preposterous theory propounding the very principle which he denounced as destructive to virtue, ruinous to society, and worthy of punishment by the government. For it seems that, after all, the Will of those whose "dispositions are not moderate" is not free; and we may surely say that those whose dispositions are least moderate, are exactly the most violent malefactors against the common weal. One more passage is worth quoting to show how little the writer had seized the true meaning of the debate. "According to you," he says to Bayle, "it is not clear that it is at the pure choice of my will to move my arm or not to move it: if that be so, it is then necessarily determined that within a quarter of an hour from now I shall lift my hand three times together, or that I shall not. Now, if you seriously pretend that I am not free, you cannot refuse an offer that I make you; I will wager a thousand pistoles to one that I will do, in the matter of moving my hand, exactly the opposite to what you back; and you may take your choice. If you do think the wager fair, it can only be because of your necessary and invincible judgment that I am free." As if the will to move or not to move the arm would be uncaused and unaffected by antecedents, when you have just provided so strong an antecedent as the desire to save a

thousand pistoles. It was, perhaps, well enough for Voltaire to content himself with vague poetical material for his poetical discourse on Liberty, but from Diderot, whether as editor or as writer, something better might have been expected than a clumsy reproduction of the reasoning by which men like Turretini had turned philosophy into the corrupted handmaid of theology.

The most extraordinary thing about this extraordinary article still remains to be told. It was written, we may suppose, between 1757 and 1762, or about that time. In June, 1756, Diderot wrote to a certain Landois, a fellow-worker on the Encyclopædia, a letter containing the most emphatic possible repudiation of the whole doctrine of Liberty. "Liberty is a word void of sense; there are not and there never can have been free beings; we are only what fits in with the general order, with organisation, with education, and with the chain of events. We can no more conceive a being acting without a motive than we can conceive one of the arms of a balance acting without a weight; and the motive is always exterior and foreign to us, attached either by nature or by some cause or other that is not ourselves. *There is only one sort of causes, properly speaking, and those are, physical causes.*"[188] And so forth in the vein of hard and remorseless necessarianism, which we shall find presently in the pages of the System of Nature.[189]

There is only one explanation of this flagrant contradiction. Diderot must have written on Liberty just as he wrote on Jesus Christ or the Bible. He cannot have said what he thought, but only what the persons in authority required him to pretend to think. We may he sure that a letter to an intimate would be more likely to contain his real opinion than an article published in the Encyclopædia. That such mystifications are odious, are shameful, are almost too degrading a price to pay for the gains of such a work, we may all readily enough admit. All that we can do is to note so flagrant a case, as a striking example of the common artifices of the time. One other point we

may note. The fervour and dexterity with which Diderot made what he knew to be the worse appear the better cause, make a still more striking example of his astonishing dramatic power of throwing himself, as dialectician, casuist, sophist, into a false and illusive part.

Turning from the philosophical to the political or social group of articles, we find little to add to what has been said in the previous section. One of the most excellent essays in this group is that on Luxury. Diderot opens ingeniously with a list of the propositions that state the supposed evils of luxury, and under each proposition he places the most striking case that he can find in history of its falseness. He goes through the same process with the propositions asserting the gains of luxury to society. Having thus effectually disposed of any wholesale way of dealing with the subject, he proceeds to make a number of observations on the gains and drawbacks of luxury; these are full of sense and freedom from commonplace. Such articles as *Pouvoir, Souverain, Autorité*, do little more than tell over again the old unhistoric story about a society surrendering a portion of its sovereign power to some individual or dynasty to hold in trust. It is worth remarking how little democratic were Diderot and his school in any Jacobinical, or anarchic, or even more respectable modern sense. There is in Diderot's contributions many a firm and manly plea for the self-respect of the common people, but not more than once or twice is there a syllable of the disorder which smoulders under the pages of Rousseau. Thus: "When the dwellers among the fields are well treated, the number of proprietors insensibly grows greater, the extreme distance and the vile dependence of poor on rich grow less; hence the people have courage, force of soul, and strength of body; they love their country, they respect the magistrates, they are attached to a prince, to an order, and to laws to which they owe their peace and well-being. And you will no longer see the son of the honourable tiller of the soil so ready to quit the noble calling of his forefathers, nor so

ready to go and sully himself with the liveries and with the contempt of the man of wealth."[190]

No one can find fault with democratic sentiment of this kind, nor with the generous commonplaces of the moralist, about virtue being the only claim to honour, and vice the only true source of shame and inferiority. But neither Diderot nor Voltaire ever allowed himself to flatter the crowd for qualities which the crowd can scarcely possess. The little article on Multitude seems merely inserted for the sake of buffeting unwarranted pretensions. "Distrust the judgment of the multitude in all matters of reasoning and philosophy; there its voice is the voice of malice, folly, inhumanity, irrationality, and prejudice. Distrust it again in things that suppose much knowledge or a fine taste. The multitude is ignorant and dulled. Distrust it in morality; it is not capable of strong and generous actions; it rather wonders at such actions than approves them; heroism is almost madness in its eyes. Distrust it in the things of sentiment; is delicacy of sentiment so common a thing that you can accord it to the multitude? In what then is the multitude right? In everything, but only at the end of a very long time, because then it has become an echo, repeating the judgment of a small number of sensible men who shape the judgment of posterity for it beforehand. If you have on your side the testimony of your conscience, and against you that of the multitude, take comfort and be assured that time does justice." It is far from being a universal gift among men of letters and others to unite this fastidious estimation of the incapacity of the crowd in the higher provinces of the intellectual judgment, with a fervid desire that the life of the crowd should be made worthy of self-respecting men.

The same hand that wrote the defiance of the populace that has just been quoted, wrote also this short article on Misery: "There are few souls so firm that misery does not in the long run cast them down and degrade them. The poor common people are incredibly stupid. I know not what false dazzling

prestige closes their eyes to their present wretchedness, and to the still deeper wretchedness that awaits the years of old age. Misery is the mother of great crimes. It is the sovereigns who make the miserable, and it is they who shall answer in this world and the other for the crimes that misery has committed."

So far as the mechanism of government is concerned, Diderot writes much as Montesquieu had done. Under the head of *Représentants* he proclaims the advantages, not exactly of government by a representative assembly, but of assisting and advising the royal government by means of such an assembly. There is no thought of universal suffrage. "*It is property that makes the citizen*; every man who has possessions in the state is interested in the state, and whatever be the rank that particular conventions may assign to him, it is always as a proprietor; it is by reason of his possessions that he ought to speak, and that he acquires the right of having himself represented." Yet this very definite statement does not save him from the standing difficulty of a democratic philosophy of politics. Nor can it be reconciled in point of logic with other propositions to which Diderot commits himself in the same article. For instance, he says that "no order of citizens is capable of stipulating for all; if one order had the right, it would very soon come to stipulate only for itself; each class ought to be represented by men who know its condition and its needs; *these needs are only well known to those who actually feel them*." But then, in that case, the poorest classes are those who have most need of direct representation; they are the most numerous, their needs are sharpest, they are the classes to which war, consumption of national capital and way of expending national income, equal laws, judicial administration, and the other concerns of a legislative assembly, come most close. The problem is to reconcile the sore interests of the multitude with the ignorance and the temper imputed in Diderot's own description of them.

An interesting study might be made, if the limits of our subject permitted such a digression, on the new political ideas which a century's experience in England, France, Germany, the American Union, has added to the publicist's stock. Diderot's article on the Legislator is a curious mixture of views which political thinkers have left behind, with views which the most enlightened statesmen have taken up. There is much talk after the fashion of Jean Jacques Rousseau about the admirable legislation of Lycurgus at Sparta, the philosophical government of the great empire of China, and the fine spirit of the institutions of Peru. We perceive that the same influences which made Rousseau's political sentimentalism so popular also brought even strong heads like Diderot to believe in the unbounded power of a government to mould men at its will, and to impose institutions at discretion. The idea that it is the main function of a government to make its people virtuous, is generally as strong in Diderot as it was in Rousseau, and as it became in Robespierre. He admires the emperors of China, because their edicts are as the exhortation of a father to his children. All edicts, he says, ought to instruct and to exhort as much as they command. Yet two years after the Encyclopædia was finished (1774), when Turgot prefaced his reforming edicts by elaborate and reasoned statements of the grounds for them, it was found that his prefaces caused greater provocation than the very laws that they introduced.

Apart from the common form of enthusiasm for the "sublime legislation" of countries which the writer really knew nothing about, the article on the Legislator has some points worth noticing. We have seen how Diderot made the possession of property the true note of citizenship, and of a claim to share in the government. But he did not pay property this compliment for nothing. It is, he says, the business of the legislator to do his best to make up to mankind for the loss of that equality which was one of the comforts that men surrendered when they gave up the state of nature. Hence the

legislator ought to take care that no one shall reach a position of extreme opulence otherwise than by an industry that enriches the state. “He must take care that the charges of society shall fall upon the rich, who enjoy the advantages of society.” Even those who agree with Diderot, and are ready to vote for a graduated income-tax, will admit that he comes to his conclusion without knowing or reflecting about either the serious arguments for it, or the serious objections against it.

What is really interesting in this long article is its anticipation of those ideas which in England we associate with the name of Cobden. “All the men of all lands have become necessary to one another for the exchange of the fruits of industry and the products of the soil. Commerce is a new bond among men. Every nation has an interest in these days in the preservation by every other nation of its wealth, its industry, its banks, its luxury, its agriculture. The ruin of Leipsic, of Lisbon, and of Lima has led to bankruptcies on all the exchanges of Europe, and has affected the fortunes of many millions of persons.”[191] In the same spirit he foresees the decline of patriotism in its older and narrower sense, and the predominance of the international over the national sentiment. “All nations now have sufficiently just ideas of their neighbours, and consequently they have less enthusiasm for their country than in the old days of ignorance. There is little enthusiasm where there is much light; enthusiasm is nearly always the emotion of a soul that is more passionate than it is instructed. By comparing among all nations laws with laws, talents with talents, and manners with manners, nations will find so little reason to prefer themselves to others, that if they preserve for their own country that love which is the fruit of personal interest, at least they will lose that enthusiasm which is the fruit of an exclusive self-esteem.”

Yet Diderot had the perspicacity to discern the drawbacks to such a revolution in the conditions of social climate. “Commerce, like

enlightenment, lessens ferocity, but also, just as enlightenment takes away the enthusiasm of self-esteem, so perhaps commerce takes away the enthusiasm of virtue. It gradually extinguishes the spirit of magnanimous disinterestedness, and replaces it by that of hard justice. By turning men's minds rather to use than beauty, to prudence rather than to greatness, it may be that it injures the strength, the generosity, the nobleness of manners."

All this, whether it comes to much or little, is at least more true than Diderot's assurance that henceforth for any nation in Europe to make conquests must be a moral impossibility. Napoleon Bonaparte was then a child in arms. Whether his career was on the whole a fulfilment or a contradiction of Diderot's proposition, may be disputed.

And so our sketch of the great book must at length end. Let us make one concluding remark. Is it not surprising that a man of Diderot's speculative boldness and power should have failed to rise from the mechanical arrangement of thought and knowledge, up to some higher and more commanding conception of the relation between himself in the eighteenth century, or ourselves in the nineteenth, and all those great systems of thought, method, and belief, which in various epochs and over different spaces of the globe have given to men working answers to the questions that their leading spirits were moved to put to themselves and to the iron universe around them? We constantly feel how near Diderot is to the point of view that would have brought light. We feel how very nearly ready he was to see the mental experiences of the race in east and west, not as superstition, degradation, grovelling error, but as aspects of intellectual effort and aspiration richly worthy of human interest and scientific consideration, and in their aim as well as in their substance all of one piece with the newest science and the last voices of religious or anti-religious development. Diderot was the one member of the party of Philosophers who was capable of grasping such a thought. If this guiding idea of the unity of

the intellectual history of man, and the organic integrity of thought, had happily come into Diderot's mind, we should have had an Encyclopædia indeed; a survey and representation of all the questions and answers of the world, such as would in itself have suggested what questions are best worth putting, and at the same time have furnished its own answers.

For this the moment was not yet. An urgent social task lay before France and before Europe; it could not be postponed until the thinkers had worked out a scheme of philosophic completeness. The thinkers did not seriously make any effort after this completeness. The Encyclopædia was the most serious attempt, and it did not wholly fail. As I replace in my shelves this mountain of volumes, "dusky and huge, enlarging on the sight," I have a presentiment that their pages will seldom again be disturbed by me or by others. They served a great purpose a hundred years ago. They are now a monumental ruin, clothed with all the profuse associations of history. It is no Ozymandias of Egypt, king of kings, whose wrecked shape of stone and sterile memories we contemplate. We think rather of the gray and crumbling walls of an ancient stronghold reared by the endeavour of stout hands and faithful, whence in its own day and generation a band once went forth against barbarous hordes, to strike a blow for humanity and truth.

CHAPTER VI. SOCIAL LIFE (1759-1770).

ANY ONE MUST be ignorant of the facts who supposes that the men of the eighteenth century who did not believe in God, and were as little continent as King David, were therefore no better than the reckless vagabonds of Grub Street. Diderot, after he had once settled down to his huge task, became a very orderly person. It is true that he had an attachment to a lady who was not his wife. Marriage was in those days, among the courtiers and the encyclopædic circle, too habitually regarded as merely an official relation. Provided that there was no official desertion, and no scandal, the world had nothing to say. Diderot was no worse than his neighbours, though we may well be sorry that a man of his generous sympathies and fine impulse was no better than his neighbours. Mademoiselle Voland, after proper deduction made for the manners of the time, was of a respectable and sentimental type. Her family were of good position; she lived with her mother and sisters, and Diderot was on good terms with them all. We have a glimpse of the characteristics of the three ladies in a little dialogue between Diderot and some one whom he met, and who happened to have made their acquaintance. “He informed me that he had passed three months in the country where you are. — *Three months*, said he, *is more than one needs to go mad about Madame Le Gendre*.[192] — True, but then she is so reserved. — *I scarcely know any woman with such an amount of self-respect*. — She is quite right. — *Madame Voland is a woman of rare merit*. — Yes, and her eldest daughter? — *She has the cleverness of a very devil*. — She is very clever, no doubt; but what I especially like is her frankness. I would lay a wager that she has never told a voluntary lie since she came to years of discretion.”[193] The relations between Diderot and Sophie Voland were therefore not at all on the common footing of a low amour with a coarse or

frivolous woman of the world. All the proprieties of appearance were scrupulously observed. Their mutual passion, though once not wholly without its gallantries, soon took on that worthy and decorous quality into which the ardour of valiant youth is reluctantly softened by middle age, when we gravely comfort it with names of philosophical compliment.

One of the most interesting of all the documentary memorials of the century is to be found in the letters which Diderot wrote to Mademoiselle Voland. No doubt has ever been thrown on the authenticity of these letters, and they bear ample evidence of genuineness, so far as the substance of them is concerned, in their characteristic style. They were first published in 1830, from manuscripts sold to the bookseller the year before by a certain French man of letters, Jeudy-Dugour by name. He became a naturalised Russian, changed his name to Gouroff, and died in the position of councillor of state and director of the university of St. Petersburg. How he came by any papers of Diderot it is impossible to guess. It is assumed that when Mademoiselle Voland died her family gave his letters and other papers back to Diderot. These, along with other documents, are supposed to have been given by Diderot to Grimm. Thence they went to the Library of the Hermitage at St. Petersburg. Whether Jeudy-Dugour sold copies or originals, and whether he made the copies, if copies they were, from the Library, which was, however, rigorously closed during the reign of Nicholas I., are literary secrets which it is impossible to fathom. So far as Diderot is concerned, some of the spirit of mystification that haunted literature in the eighteenth century still hovers about it in the nineteenth. This we shall presently find in a still more interesting monument of Diderot than even his letters to Mademoiselle Voland.[194]

They are not a continuous series. It was only when either Diderot was absent from Paris, or his correspondent was away at her mother’s house in the country, that letter-writing was necessary. Diderot appears to have

written to her openly and without disguise. The letters of Mademoiselle Voland in reply were for obvious reasons not sent to Diderot's house, but under cover to the office of Damilaville, so well known to the reader of Voltaire's correspondence. Damilaville was a commissioner in one of the revenue departments, and it is one among many instances of the connivance between authority and its foes, that most of the letters and packets of Voltaire, Diderot, and the rest of the group, should have been taken in, sent out, guarded, and franked by the head of a government office. The trouble that Damilaville willingly took in order to serve his friends is another example of what we have already remarked as the singular amiability and affectionate solicitude of those times. "Think of Damilaville's attention," says Diderot on one occasion: "to-day is Sunday, and he was obliged to leave his office. He was sure that I should come this evening, for I never fail when I hope for a letter from you. He left the key with two candles on a table, and between the two candles your little letter, and a pleasant note of his own." And by the light of the candles Diderot at once wrote a long answer.[195]

We need not wonder if much is said in these letters of tardy couriers, missing answers, intolerable absences, dreary partings, delicious anticipations. All these are the old eternal talk of men and women, ever since the world began; without them we should hardly know that we are reading the words of man to woman. They are in our present case only the setting of a curiously frank and open picture of a man's life.

It is held by some that one of the best means of giving the sense of a little fixity to lives that are but as the evanescent fabric of a dream and the shadow of smoke, is to secure stability of topographical centre by abiding in the same house. Diderot is one of the few who complied with this condition. For thirty years he occupied the fourth and fifth floors of a house which was still standing not long ago, at the corner of the Rue Saint Benoit by the Rue

Taranne, in that Paris which our tourists leave unexplored, but which is nevertheless the true Paris of the eighteenth century. Of the equipment of his room we have a charming picture by the hand of its occupant. It occurs in his playful Regrets on My Old Dressing-gown, so rich in happy and delightful touches.

"What induced me to part with it? It was made for me; I was made for it. It moulded itself to all the turns and outlines of my body without fretting me. I was picturesque and beautiful; its successor, so stiff, so heavy, makes a mere mannikin of me. There was no want to which, its complaisance did not lend itself, for indigence is ever obsequious. Was a book covered with dust, one of the lappets offered itself to wipe the dust away. Did the thick ink refuse to flow from the pen, it offered a fold. You saw traced in the long black lines upon it how many a service it had rendered me. Those long lines announced the man of letters, the writer, the workman. And now I have all the mien of a rich idler; you know not who I may be. I was the absolute master of my old robe; I am the slave of my new one. The dragon that guarded the golden fleece was not more restless than I. Care wraps me about.

"The old man who has delivered himself up bound hand and foot to the caprices of a young giddypate, says from morning to night: Ah, where is my old, my kind housekeeper? What demon possessed me the day that I dismissed her for this creature? Then he sighs, he weeps. I do not weep nor sigh; but at every moment I say: Cursed be the man who invented the art of making common stuff precious by dyeing it scarlet! Cursed be the costly robe that I stand in awe of! Where is my old, my humble, my obliging piece of homespun?

"That is not all, my friend. Hearken to the ravages of luxury — of a luxury that must needs be consistent with itself. My old gown was at one with the things about me. A straw-bottomed chair, a wooden table, a deal

shelf that held a few books, and three or four engravings, dimmed by smoke, without a frame, nailed at the four corners to the wall. Among the engravings three or four casts in plaster were hung up; they formed, with my old dressing-gown, the most harmonious indigence. All has become discord. No more *ensemble*, no more unity, no more beauty.

"The woman who comes into the house of a widower, the minister who steps into the place of a statesman in disgrace, the molinist bishop who gets hold of the diocese of a jansenist bishop — none of these people cause more trouble than the intruding scarlet has caused to me.

"I can bear without disgust the sight of a peasant-woman. The bit of coarse canvas that covers her head, the hair falling about her cheeks, the rags that only half cover her, the poor short skirt that goes no more than half-way down her legs, the naked feet covered with mud — all these things do not wound me; 'tis the image of a condition that I respect, 'tis the sign and summary of a state that is inevitable, that is woful, and that I pity with all my heart. But my gorge rises, and in spite of the scented air that follows her, I turn my eyes from the courtesan, whose fine lace head-gear and torn cuffs, white stockings and worn-out shoes, show me the misery of the day in company with the opulence of last night. Such would my house have been, if the imperious scarlet had not forced all into harmony with itself. I had two engravings that were not without merit, Poussin's Manna in the Wilderness, and the same painter's Esther before Ahasuerus; the one is driven out in shame by some old man of Rubens's, the Fall of the Manna is scattered to the winds by a Storm of Vernet's. The old straw chair is banished to the ante-room by a luxurious thing of morocco. Homer, Virgil, Horace, Cicero, have been taken from their shelf and shut up in a case of grand marqueterie work, an asylum worthier of them than of me. The wooden table still held its ground, protected by a vast pile of pamphlets and papers heaped pell-mell upon it; they seemed as if they would long protect

it from its doom. Yet one day that too was mastered by fate, and in spite of my idleness pamphlets and papers went to arrange themselves in the shelves of a costly bureau....It was thus that the edifying retreat of the philosopher became transformed into the scandalous cabinet of the farmer-general. Thus I too am insulting the national misery.

"Of my early mediocrity there remained only a list carpet. The shabby carpet hardly matches with my luxury. I feel it. But I have sworn and I swear that I will keep this carpet, as the peasant, who was raised from the hut to the palace of his sovereign, still kept his wooden shoes. When in a morning, clad in the sumptuous scarlet, I enter my room, if I lower my eyes I perceive my old list carpet; it recalls to me my early state, and rising pride stands checked. No, my friend, I am not corrupted. My door is open as ever to want; it finds me affable as ever; I listen to its tale, I counsel, I pity, I succour it." ...

Yet the interior of Socrates-Diderot was as little blessed by domestic sympathy as the interior of the older and greater Socrates. Of course Diderot was far enough from being faultless. His wife is described by Rousseau as a shrew and a scold. It is too plain that she was so; sullen to her husband, impatient with her children, and exacting and unreasonable with her servants.[196] We cannot pretend accurately to divide the blame. The companionship was very dreary, and the picture grievous and most afflicting to our thoughts. Diderot returns in the evening from Holbach's, throws his carpet-bag in at the door, flies off to seek a letter from Mademoiselle Voland, writes one to her, gets back to his house at midnight, finds his daughter ill, puts cheerful and cordial questions to his wife, she replies with a tartness that drives him back into silence.[197] Another time the scene is violent. A torrent of injustice and unreasonableness flows over him for two long hours, and he wonders what the woman will profit, after she has made him burst a blood-vessel; he groans in anguish, "Ah, how hard

life seems to me to bear! How many a time would I accept the end of it with joy!”[198] So sharp are the goads in a divided house; so sorely, with ache and smart and deep-welling tears, do men and women rend into shreds the fine web of one another’s lives. But the pity of it, O the pity of it!

There are many brighter intervals which make one willing to suppose that if the wife had been a little more patient, more tolerant, more cheerful, less severely addicted to her sterile superstition, there might have been somewhat more happiness in the house. One misery of the present social ideal of women is that, while it keeps them so systematically ignorant, superstitious, and narrow, it leaves them without humility. “Be content,” said the great John Wesley to his froward wife, “be content to be a private insignificant person, known and loved by God and me. Of what importance is your character to mankind? If you was buried just now, or if you had never lived, what loss would it be to the cause of God?” This energetic remonstrance can hardly be said to exhaust the matter. Still it puts a wholesome side of the case which Madame Diderot missed, and which better persons are likely to miss, so long as the exclusion of women, by common opinion or by law, from an active participation in the settlement of great issues, makes them indifferent to all interests outside domestic egoism, and egoistic and personal religion. Brighter intervals shone in the household. “I announced my departure,” writes Diderot, “for next Tuesday. At the first word I saw the faces both of mother and daughter fall. The child had a compliment for my fête-day all ready, and it would not do to let her waste the trouble of having learnt it. The mother had projected a grand dinner for Sunday. Well, we arranged everything perfectly. I made my journey, and came back to be harangued and feasted. The poor child made her little speech in the most bewitching way. In the middle there came some hard words, so she stopped and said to me, ‘My papa, ’tis because my two front teeth have come out’ — as was true. Then she went on. At the end, as

she had a posy to give me, and it could not be found, she stopped a second time to say to me— 'Here's the worst of the tale; my pinks have got lost.' Then she started off in search of her flowers. We dined in great style. My wife had got all her friends together. I was very gay, eating, drinking, and doing the honours of my table to perfection. On rising from table I stayed among them and played cards instead of going out. I saw them all off between eleven and twelve: I was charming, and if you only knew with whom; what physiognomies, what folk, what talk!"

Another time the child, whispering in his ear, asks why her mother bade her not remind him that the morrow was the mother's fête-day. The presence of the blithe all-hoping young, looking on with innocent unconscious eyes at the veiled tragedy of love turned to bitter discord, gives to such scenes their last touch of piteousness. Diderot, however, observed the day, and presented a bouquet which was neither well or ill received. At the birthday dinner the master of the house presided. "If you had been behind the curtains, you would have said to yourself, how can all this gossip and twaddle find a place in the same head with certain ideas! And in truth I was charming, and played the fool to a marvel."[199]

In the midst of distractions great and small, was an indomitable industry. "I tell you," he wrote, "and I tell all men, when you are ill at ease with yourself, instantly set about some good work. In busying myself to soothe the trouble of another, I forget my own." He was assiduous in teaching his daughter, though he complained that her mother crushed out in a day what it had taken him a month to implant. The booksellers found him the most cheerful and strenuous bondsman that ever booksellers had. He would pass a whole month without a day's break, working ten hours every day at the revision of proof-sheets. Sometimes he remains a whole week without leaving his workroom. He wears out his eyes over plates and diagrams, bristling with figures and letters, and with no more refreshing thought in the

midst of this sore toil than that insult, persecution, torment, trickery, will be the fruit of it. He not only spent whole days bent over his desk, until he had a feeling as of burning flame within him; he also worked through the hours of the night. On one of these occasions, worn out with fatigue and weariness, he fell asleep with his head on his desk; the light fell down among his papers, and he awoke to find half the books and papers on the desk burnt to ashes. "I kept my own counsel about it," he writes, "because a single hint of such an accident would have robbed my wife of sleep for the rest of her life."[200]

His favourite form of holiday was a visit to Holbach's country house at Grandval. Here he spent some six weeks or more nearly every autumn after 1759. The manner of life there was delightful to him. There was perfect freedom, the mistress of the house neither rendering strict duties of ceremony nor exacting them. Diderot used to rise at six or at eight, and remain in his own room until one, reading, writing, meditating. Nobody was more exquisitely sensible than Diderot to the charm of loitering over books, "over those authors," as he said, "who ravish us from ourselves, in whose hands nature has placed a fairy wand, with which they no sooner touch us, than straightway we forget the evils of life, the darkness lifts from our souls, and we are reconciled to existence."[201] The musing suggestiveness of reading when we read only for reading's sake, and not for reproduction nor direct use, was as delightful to our laborious drudge as to others, but he could indulge himself with little of this sweet idleness. It was in harder labour that he passed most of his mornings. These hours of work achieved, he dressed and went down among his friends. Then came the mid-day dinner, which was sumptuous; host and guests both ate and drank more than was good for their health. After a short siesta, towards four o'clock they took their sticks and went forth to walk, among woods, over ploughed fields, up hills, through quagmires, delighting in nature. As they went, they

talked of history, or politics, or chemistry, of literature, or physics, or morality. At sundown they returned, to find lights and cards on the tables, and they made parties of piquet, interrupted by supper. At half-past ten the game ends, they chat until eleven, and in half an hour more they are all fast asleep.[202] Each day was like the next; industry, gaiety, bodily comfort, mental activity, diversifying the hours. Grimm was often there, "the most French of all the Germans," and Galiani, the most nimble-witted of men, inexhaustible in story, inimitable in pantomimic narration, and yet with the keenest intellectual penetration shining through all his Neapolitan prank and buffoonery. Holbach cared most for the physical sciences. Marmontel brought a vein of sentimentalism, and Helvétius a vein of cynical formalism. Diderot played Socrates, Panurge, Pantophile; questioning, instructing, combining; pouring out knowledge and suggestion, full of interest in every subject, sympathetic with every vein, relishing alike the newest philosophic hardihood, the last too merry mood of Holbach's mother-in-law, the freshest piece of news brought by a traveller. It was not at Grandval that he found life hard to bear, or would have accepted its close with joy. And indeed if one could by miracle be transported back into the sixth decade of that dead century for a single day, perhaps one might choose that such a day should be passed among the energetic and vivid men who walked of an afternoon among the fields and woods of Grandval.

The unblushing grossness of speech which even the ladies of the party permitted themselves cannot be reproduced in the decorous print of our age. It is nothing less than inconceivable to us how Diderot can have brought himself to write down, in letters addressed to a woman of good education and decent manners, some of the talk that went on at Grandval. The coarsest schoolboy of these days would wince at such shameless freedoms. But it would be wrong to forget the allowance that must be made for differences in point of fashion. Diderot, for instance, in these very letters is wonderfully

frank in his exposure of the details of his health. He describes his indigestions, and other more indescribable obstructions to happiness, as freely as Cicero wrote about the dysentery which punished him, when, after he had resisted oysters and lampreys at supper, he yielded to a dish of beet and mallow so dressed with pot-herbs, *ut nil posset esse suavius*. Whatever men could say to one another or to their surgeons they saw no harm in saying to women. We have to remember how Sir Walter Scott's great-aunt, about the very time when Diderot was writing to Mademoiselle Voland, had heard Mrs. Aphra Behn's books read aloud for the amusement of large circles, consisting of the first and most creditable society in London. We think of Swift, in an earlier period of the century, enclosing to Stella some recklessly gross verses of his own upon Bolingbroke, and habitually writing to fine ladies in a way that Falstaff might have thought too bad for Doll Tearsheet. In saying that these coarse impurities are only points of manners, we are as far as possible from meaning that they are on that account unimportant. But it is childish to waste our time in censorious judgment on the individual who does no worse than represent a ruling type. We can only note the difference and pass on.

A characteristic trait in this rural life is Diderot's passion for high winds. They gave him a transport, and to hear the storm at night, tossing the trees, drenching the ground with rain, and filling the air with the bass of its hoarse ground-tones, was one of his keenest delights.[203] Yet Diderot was not of those in whom the feeling for the great effects of nature has something of savagery. He was above all things human, and the human lot was the central source of his innermost meditations. In the midst of gossip is constantly interpolated some passage of fine reflection on life — reflection as sincere, as real, coming as spontaneously from the writer's inmost mood and genuine sentiment, as little tainted either by affectation or by commonness, as ever passed through the mind of a man. Some of these are too

characteristic to be omitted, and there is so little of what is exquisite in the flavour of Diderot's style, that he perhaps suffers less from the clumsiness of translation than writers of finer colour or more stirring melody. One of these passages is as follows: —

"The last news from Paris has made the Baron anxious, as he has considerable sums in royal securities. He said to his wife: 'Listen, my friend; if this is going on, I put down the carriage, I buy you a good cloak and a good parasol, and for the rest of our days we will bless the minister for ridding us of horses, lackeys, coachmen, ladies'-maids, cooks, great dinner-parties, false friends, tiresome bores, and all the other privileges of opulence.' And for my part I began to think, that for a man without a wife or child, or any of those connections that make us long for money, and never leave any superfluity, it would be almost indifferent whether he were poor or rich. This paradox comes of the equality that I discover among various conditions of life, and in the little difference that I allow, in point of happiness, between the master of the house and the hall-porter. If I am sound in mind and body, if I have worth and a pure conscience, if I know the true from the false, if I avoid evil and do good, if I feel the dignity of my being, if nothing lowers me in my own eyes, then people may call me what they will, *My Lord,* or *Sirrah*. To do what is good, to know what is true — that is what distinguishes one man from another; the rest is nothing. The duration of life is so short, its true needs are so narrow, and when we go away, it all matters so little whether we have been somebody or nobody. When the end comes, all that you want is a sorry piece of canvas and four deal boards. In the morning I hear the labourers under my window. Scarce has the day dawned before they are at work with spade and barrow, delving and wheeling. They munch a crust of black bread; they quench their thirst at the flowing stream; at noon they snatch an hour of sleep on the hard ground. They are cheerful; they sing as they work; they exchange their good broad

pleasantries with one another; they shout with laughter. At sundown they go home to find their children naked round a smoke-blackened hearth, a woman hideous and dirty, and their lot is neither worse nor better than mine. I came down from my room in bad spirits; I heard talk about the public misery; I sat down to a table full of good cheer without an appetite; I had a stomach overloaded with the dainties of the day before; I grasped a stick and set out for a walk to find relief; I returned to play cards, and cheat the heavy-weighing hours. I had a friend of whom I could not hear; I was far from a woman whom I sighed for. Troubles in the country, troubles in the town, troubles everywhere. He who knows not trouble is not to be counted among the children of men. All gets paid off in time; the good by the evil, evil by good, and life is naught. Perhaps to-morrow night or Monday morning we may go to pass a day in town; so I shall see the woman for whom I sighed, and recover the man of whom I could not hear. But I shall lose them the next day; and the more I feel the happiness of being with them, the worse I shall suffer at parting. That is the way that all things go. Turn and turn and turn again; there is ever a crumpled rose-leaf to vex you."[204]

It is not often that we find such active benevolence as Diderot's, in conjunction with such a vein of philosophy as follows: —

"Ah, what a fine comedy this world would be, if only one had not to play a part in it; if one existed, for instance, in some point of space, in that interval of the celestial orbs where the gods of Epicurus slumber, far, far away, whence one could see this globe, on which we strut so big, about the size of a pumpkin, and whence one could watch all the airs and tricks of that two-footed mite who calls itself man. I would fain only look at the scenes of life in reduced size, so that those which are stamped with atrocity may be brought down to an inch in space, and to actors half a line high. But how bizarre, that our sense of revolt against injustice is in the ratio of the

space and the mass. I am furious if a large animal unjustly attacks another. I feel nothing at all if it is two atoms that tear and rend. How our senses affect our morality. There is a fine text for philosophising!"[205]

"What I see every day of physic and physicians does not much heighten my opinion of them. To come into the world in imbecility, in the midst of anguish and cries; to be the toy of ignorance, of error, of necessity, of sickness, of malice, of all passions; to return step by step to that imbecility whence one sprang; from the moment when we lisp our first words, down to the moment when we mumble the words of our dotage, to live among rascals and charlatans of every kind; to lie expiring between a man who feels your pulse, and another man who frets and wearies your head; not to know whence one comes, nor why one has come, nor whither one is going — that is what we call the greatest gift of our parents and of nature — human life."[206]

These sombre meditations hardly represent Diderot's habitual vein; they are rather a reaction and a relief from the busy intensity with which he watches the scene, and is constantly putting interrogatories to human life, as day by day its motley circumstance passes before his eyes. We should scarcely suspect from his frequent repetitions of the mournful eternal chorus of the nullity of man and the vanity of all the things that are under the sun, how alert a watch he kept on incident and character, with what keen and open ear he listened for any curious note of pain, or voice of fine emotion, or odd perversity of fate. All this he does, not in the hard temper of a Balzac, not with the calm or pride of a Goethe, but with an overflowing fulness of spontaneous and uncontrollable sympathy. He is a sentimentalist in the rationalistic century, not with the sentimentalism of misanthropy, such as fired or soured Rousseau, but social, large-hearted, many-sided, careless of the wise rigours of morality. He is never callous nor neutral; on the contrary, he is always approving or disapproving, but not from the

standards of the ethical text-books. The casuistry of feeling is of everlasting interest to him, and he is never tired of inventing imaginary cases, or pondering real ones, in which pliant feeling is invoked against the narrowness of duty. These are mostly in a kind of matter which modern taste hardly allows us to reproduce; nor, after all, is there much to be gained by turning the sanctities of human relationship, with all their immeasurable bliss, their immeasurable woe, into the playthings of an idle dialectic. It is pleasanter, and for us English not less instructive than pleasant, to see this dreaming, restless, thrice ingenious spirit, half Titan of the skies, half gnome of the lower earth, entering joyously or pitifully into the simple charm and natural tenderness of life as it comes and passes. Nothing delights him more than to hear or to tell such a story as this of Madame D'Epinay. She had given a small lad eighteen sous for a day's work. At night he went home without a farthing. When his mother asked him whether they had given him nothing for his work, he said No. The mother found out that this was untrue, and insisted on knowing what had become of the eighteen sous. The poor little creature had given them to an alehouse-keeper, where his father had been drinking all day; and so he had spared the worthy man a rough scene with his wife when he got home.[207]

From the pathos of kindly youth to the grace of lovable age the step is not far. "To-day I have dined with a charming woman, who is only eighty years old. She is full of health and cheerfulness; her soul is still all gentleness and tenderness. She talks of love and friendship with the fire and sensibility of a girl of twenty. There were three men of us at table with her; she said to us, 'My friends, a delicate conversation, a true and passionate look, a tear, a touched expression, those are the good things of the world; as for all besides, it is hardly worth talking of. There are certain things that were said to me when I was young, and that I remember to this day, and any one of those words is to be preferred before ten glorious deeds: by my faith,

I believe if I heard them even now, my old heart would beat the quicker.' 'Madame, the reason is that your heart has grown no older.' 'No, my son, you are right; it is as young as ever. It is not for having kept me alive so long that I thank God, but for having kept me kind-hearted, gentle, and full of feeling.'"[208] All this was after

Diderot's own heart, and he declares such a conversation to be worth more than all the hours of talk on politics and philosophy that he had been having a few days before with some English friends. We may understand how, as we shall presently see, a member of a society that could relish the beauty of such a scene, would be likely to think Englishmen hard, surly, and cheerless.

His letters constantly offer us sensible and imaginative reflection. He amused himself in some country village by talking to an old man of eighty. "I love children and old men; the latter seem to me like some singular creatures that have been spared by caprice of fate." He meets some old schoolfellows at Langres, nearly all the rest having gone: "Well, there are two things that warn us of our end, and set us musing — old ruins, and the short duration of those who began life with us." He is taken by a host over-devoted to such joys, to walk among dung-heaps. "After all," he says, "it ought not to offend one's sense. To an honest nose that has preserved its natural innocence, 'tis not a goat, but a bemusked and ambre-scented woman, who smelleth ill."

"When I compare our friendships to our antipathies, I find that the first are thin, small, pinched; we know how to hate, but we do not know how to love."

"A poet who becomes idle, does excellently well to be idle; he ought to be sure that it is not industry that fails, but that his gift is departing from him."

“Comfort the miserable; that is the true way to console yourself for my absence. I recollect saying to the Baron, when he lost his first wife, and was sure that there was not another day’s happiness left for him in this world, ‘Hasten out of doors, seek out the wretched, console them, and then you will pity yourself, if you dare.’”[209]

“An infinitude of tyrannical things interpose between us and the duties of love and friendship; and we do nothing aright. A man is neither free for his ambition, nor free for his taste, nor free for his passion. And so we all live discontented with ourselves. One of the great inconveniences of the state of society is the multitude of our occupations and, above all, the levity with which we make engagements to dispose of all our future happiness. We marry, we go into business, we have children, all before we have common sense.”[210]

After some equivocal speculations as to the conduct of a woman who, by the surrender of herself for a quarter of an hour to the desires of a powerful minister, wins an appointment for her husband and bread for her six children, he exclaims: “In truth, I think Nature heeds neither good nor evil; she is wholly wrapped up in two objects, the preservation of the individual and the propagation of the species.”[211] True; but the moral distinction between right and wrong is so much wrung from the forces that Diderot here calls Nature.

The intellectual excitement in which he lived and the energy with which he promoted it, sought relief either in calm or else in the play of sensibility. “A delicious repose,” he writes in one of his most harassed moments, “a sweet book to read, a walk in some open and solitary spot, a conversation in which one discloses all one’s heart, a strong emotion that brings the tears to one’s eyes and makes the heart beat faster, whether it comes of some tale of generous action, or of a sentiment of tenderness, of health, of gaiety, of

liberty, of indolence — there is the true happiness, nor shall I ever know any other."

A Point in Rhetoric.— "Towards six in the evening the party broke up. I remained alone with D., and as we were talking about the Eloges on Descartes that had been sent in to the Academy, I made two remarks that pleased him upon eloquence. One, that it is a mistake to try to stir the passions before convincing the reason, and that the pathetic remains without effect, when it is not prepared by the syllogism. Second, that after the orator had touched me keenly, I could not endure that he should break in upon this melting of the soul with some violent stroke: that the pathetic insists on being followed by something moderate, weak, vague, that should leave room for no contention on my part."[212]

Holbach's Impressions of England.— "The Baron has returned from England. He started with the pleasantest anticipations, he had a most agreeable reception, he had excellent health, and yet he has returned out of humour and discontented; discontented with the country, which he found neither as populous nor as well cultivated as people say; discontented with the buildings, that are nearly all bizarre and Gothic; with the gardens, where the affectation of imitating nature is worse than the monotonous symmetry of art; with the taste that heaps up in the palaces what is first-rate, what is good, what is bad, what is detestable, all pell-mell. He is disgusted at the amusements, which have the air of religious ceremonies; with the men, on whose countenances you never see confidence, friendship, gaiety, sociability, but on every face the inscription, *'What is there in common between me and you?'*; disgusted with the great people, who are gloomy, cold, proud, haughty, and vain; and with the small people, who are hard, insolent, and barbarous. The only thing that I have heard him praise is the facility of travel: he says there is not a village, even on a cross-road, where you do not find four or five post-chaises and a score of horses ready to

start.... There is no public education. The colleges — sumptuous buildings — palaces to be compared to the Tuileries, are occupied by rich idlers, who sleep and get drunk one part of the day, and the rest they spend in training, clumsily enough, a parcel of uncouth lads to be clergymen.... In the fine places that have been built for public amusements, you could hear a mouse run. A hundred stiff and silent women walk round and round an orchestra that is set up in the middle. The Baron compares these circuits to the seven processions of the Egyptians round the tomb of Osiris. A charming *mot* of my good friend Garrick, is that London is good for the English, but Paris is good for all the world.... There is a great mania for conversions and missionaries. Mr. Hume told me a story which will let you know what to think of these pretended conversions of cannibals and Hurons. A minister thought he had done a great stroke in this line; he had the vanity to wish to show his proselyte, and brought him to London. They question his little Huron, and he answers to perfection. They take him to church, and administer the sacrament, where, as you know, the communion is in both kinds. Afterwards, the minister says to him, 'Well, my son, do you not feel yourself more animated with the love of God? Does not the grace of the sacrament work within you? Is not all your soul warmed?' 'Yes,' says the Huron: 'the wine does one good, but I think it would have done still better if it had been brandy.'"[213]

Two Cases of Conscience.— "The curé said that unhappy lovers always talked about dying, but that it was very rare to find one who kept his word; still he had seen one case. It was that of a young man of family, called Soulpse. He fell in love with a young lady of beauty and of good character, but without money, and belonging to a dishonoured family. Her father was in the galleys for forgery. The young man, who foresaw all the opposition, and all the good grounds for opposition, that he would have to encounter among his family, did all that he could to cure himself of his passion; but

when he was assured of the uselessness of his efforts, he plucked up courage to open the matter to his parents, who wearied themselves with remonstrances. Our lover suddenly stopped them short, saying, ‘I know all that you have to say against me; I cannot disapprove of your reasons, which I should be the first to urge against my own son, if I had one. But consider whether you would rather have me dead or badly married; for it is certain that if I do not marry the woman that I love, I shall die of it.’ They treated this speech as it deserved; the result does not affect that. The young man fell sick, faded from day to day, and died. ‘But, Curé,’ said I, ‘in the place of the father, what would you have done?’ ‘I would have called my son; I would have said: Soulpse has been your name hitherto; never forget that it is yours no more; and call yourself by what other name you please. Here is your lawful share of our property; marry the woman you love, so far from here that I may never hear speak of you again, and God bless you. ‘For my part,’ said old Madame D’Esclavelles, ‘if I had been the mother of the young madman, I would have done exactly as his father did, and let him die.’ And upon this there was a tremendous division of opinion, and an uproar that made the room ring again.

“The dispute lasted a long time, and would be going on now if the cure had not broken it off by putting to us another case. A young priest, discontented with his profession, flees to England, apostatises, marries according to the law, and has children. After a certain time he longs for his native country; he comes back to France with his children and his wife. After that, again, he is stricken by remorse; he returns to his religion, has scruples about his marriage, and thinks of separating from his wife. He opens his heart to our curé, who finds the case very embarrassing, and not venturing to decide it, refers him to casuists and lawyers. They all decide that he cannot, with a sure conscience, remain with his wife. When the separation, which the wife opposed with all her might, was about to be

legally effected — rather against the wishes of our curé — the husband fell dangerously ill. When he knew that he could not recover, he said to the curé: 'My friend, I wish to make public amends for my backsliding, to receive the sacraments, and to die in the hospital; be kind enough to have me taken there.' 'I will take care to do no such thing,' the curé replied to him. 'This woman is innocent; she married you according to law; she knew nothing of the obstacles that existed. And these children, what share have they in your sin? You are the only wrongdoer, and it is they who are to be punished! Your wife will be disgraced, your children will be declared illegitimate, and what is the gain of it all?' And the good curé stuck to his text. He confessed his man, the illness grew worse, he administered the last sacraments. The man died, and his wife and children remained in possession of the titles they had. We all approved the curé's wisdom, and Grimm insisted on having his portrait taken."[214]

Chinese Superiority.— "Apropos of the Chinese, do you know that with them nobility ascends, and descends never? It is the children who ennoble their ancestors, and not the ancestors the children. And upon my word that is most sensible. We are greater poets, greater philosophers, greater orators, greater architects, greater astronomers, greater geometers, than these good people; but they understand better than we the science of good sense and virtue; and if peradventure that science should happen to be the first of all sciences, they would be right in saying that they have two eyes and we have only one, and all the rest of the world is blind."[215]

Why Women write good Letters.— "She writes admirably, really admirably. That is because good style is in the heart; and that is why so many women talk and write like angels without ever having learnt either to talk or to write, and why so many pedants will both talk and write ill all the days of their life, though they were never weary of studying, — only without learning."[216]

“A little adventure has just happened here that proves that all our fine sermons on intolerance have as yet produced but poor fruit. A young man of respectable birth, some say apprentice to an apothecary, others to a grocer, took it into his head to go through a course of chemistry; his master consented, on condition that he should pay for board; the lad agreed. At the end of the quarter the master demanded the money, and it was paid. Soon after, another demand from the master; the apprentice replied that he barely owed a single quarter. The master denied that the first quarter had been paid. The affair was taken into court. The master is put on his oath, and swears. He had no sooner perjured himself than the apprentice produced his receipt, and the master was straightway fined and disgraced. He was a scoundrel who deserved it, but the apprentice was a rash fellow, whose victory was bought at a price dearer than life. He had received, in payment or otherwise, from some colporteur, two copies of *Christianity Unveiled*, and one of them he had sold to his master. The master informs against him. The colporteur, his wife, and his apprentice, are all three arrested, and they have just been pilloried, whipped, and branded, and the apprentice condemned to nine years of the galleys, the colporteur to five years, and the woman to the hospital for life.... Do you see the meaning of this judgment? A colporteur brings me a prohibited book. If I buy more than one copy, I am declared to be encouraging unlawful trading, and exposed to a frightful prosecution. You have read the *Man with Forty Crowns*,[217] and will hardly be able to guess why it is placed under the ban in the judgment I am telling you of. It is in consequence of the profound resentment that our lords and masters feel about a certain article, *Tyrant*, in the *Philosophical Dictionary*. They will never forgive Voltaire for saying that it was better to have to do with a single wild beast, which one could avoid, than with a band of little subaltern tigers who are incessantly getting between your legs.... To return to those two unfortunate wretches whom they have condemned to the

galleys. When they come out, what will become of them? There will be nothing left for them to do, save to turn highway robbers. The ignominious penalties, which take away all resource from a man, are worse than the capital punishment that takes away his life."[218]

Method and Genius: an Apologue.— "There was a question between Grimm and M. Le Roy of creative genius and co-ordinating method. Grimm detests method; according to him, it is the pedantry of letters. Those who can only arrange, would do as well to remain idle; those who can only get instruction from what has been arranged, would do as well to remain ignorant. What necessity is there for so many people knowing anything else besides their trade? They said a great many things that I don't report to you, and they would be saying things still, if the Abbé Galiani had not interrupted them:

'My friends, I remember a fable: pray listen to it. One day, in the depths of a forest, a dispute arose between a Nightingale and a Cuckoo. Each prizes its own gift. What bird, said the Cuckoo, has a song so easy, so simple, so natural, so measured, as mine?

What bird, said the Nightingale, has a song sweeter, more varied, more brilliant, more touching, than mine?

The Cuckoo: I say few things, but they are things of weight, of order, and people retain them.

The Nightingale: I love to use my voice, but I am always fresh, and I never weary. I enchant the woods; the Cuckoo makes them dismal. He is so attached to the lessons of his mother, that he would not dare to venture a single note that he had not taken from her. Now for me, I recognise no master. I laugh at rules. What comparison between his pedantic method and my glorious bursts?

The Cuckoo tried several times to interrupt the Nightingale. But nightingales always go on singing, and never listen; that is rather their

weakness. Ours, carried away by his ideas, followed them with rapidity, without paying the least attention to the answers of his rival.

So after some talk and counter-talk, they agreed to refer their quarrel to the judgment of a third animal. But where were they to find this third, equally competent and impartial? It is not so easy to find a good judge. They sought on every side. As they crossed a meadow, they spied an Ass, one of the gravest and most solemn that ever was seen. Since the creation of the world, no ass had ever had such long ears. ‘Ah,’ said the Cuckoo, ‘our luck is excellent; our quarrel is a matter of ears: here is our judge. God Almighty made him for the very purpose!’

The Ass went on browsing. He little thought that one day he would have to decide a question of music. But Providence amuses itself with this and many another thing. Our two birds bow very low, compliment him upon his gravity and his judgment, explain the subject of their dispute, and beseech him, with all deference, to listen to their case and decide.

But the Ass, hardly turning his heavy head and without losing a single toothsome blade, makes them a sign with his ears that he is hungry, and that he does not hold his court to-day. The birds persist; the Ass goes on browsing. At last his hunger was appeased. There were some trees planted by the edge of the meadow. ‘Now, if you like,’ said he, ‘you go there, I will follow; you shall sing, I will digest; I will listen, and I’ll give you my opinion.’

The birds instantly fly away, and perch on branches. The Ass follows them with the air and the step of a chief justice crossing Westminster Hall: he stretches himself flat on the ground, and says, ‘Begin, the court listens.’

Says the Cuckoo: ‘My lord, there is not a word to lose. I beg of you to seize carefully the character of my singing; above all things, deign, my lord, to mark its artifice and its method.’ Then filling its throat, and flapping its wings at each note, it sang out, ‘Coucou, coucou, coucou, coucou, coucou,

coucou.’ And after having combined this in every possible way, it fell silent.

The Nightingale, without any prelude, pours forth his voice at once, launches into the most daring modulations, pursues the freshest and most delicate melodies, cadences, pauses, and trills; now you heard the notes murmuring at the bottom of its throat, like the ripple of the brook as it loses itself among the pebbles; now you heard them rising and gradually swelling and filling the air, and lingering long-drawn in the skies. It was tender, glad, brilliant, pathetic; but his music was not made for everybody.

Carried away by enthusiasm, he would be singing still; but the Ass, who had already yawned more than once, stopped him, and said, ‘I suspect that all you have been singing there is uncommonly fine, but I don’t understand a word of it: it strikes me as bizarre, incoherent, and confused. It may be you are more scientific than your rival; but he is more methodic than you, and for my part, I’m for method.’

“And then the abbé, addressing M. Le Roy, and pointing to Grimm with his finger: ‘There,’ he said, ’is the nightingale, and you the cuckoo; and I am the ass, who decide in your favour. Good-night.’

“The abbés stories are capital, but he acts in a way that makes them better still. You would have died with laughing to see him stretch his neck into the air, and imitate the fine note of the nightingale, then fill his throat, and take up the hoarse tone for the cuckoo; and all that naturally, and without effort. He is pantomime from head to foot.”[219]

Conversation.—”’Tis a singular thing, conversation, especially when the company is tolerably large. Look at the roundabout circuits we took; the dreams of a patient in delirium are not more incongruous. Still, just as there is nothing absolutely unconnected in the head either of a man who dreams, or of a lunatic, so all hangs together in conversation; but it would often be extremely hard to find the imperceptible links that have brought so many

disparate ideas together. A man lets fall a word which he detaches from what has gone before, and what has followed in his head; another does the same, and then let him catch the thread who can. A single physical quality may lead the mind that is engaged upon it to an infinity of different things. Take a colour — yellow, for instance; gold is yellow, silk is yellow, care is yellow, bile is yellow, straw is yellow; to how many other threads does not this thread answer? Madness, dreaming, the rambling of conversation, all consist in passing from one object to another, through the medium of some common quality."[220]

Annihilation.— "The conversation took a serious turn. They spoke of the horror that we all feel for annihilation.

"'Ah,' cried Father Hoop, 'be good enough to leave me out, if you please. I have been too uncomfortable the first time to have any wish to come back. If they would give me an immortality of bliss for a single day of purgatory, I would not take it. The best that can befall us is to cease to be.'

"This set me musing, and it seemed to me that so long as I was in good health I should agree with Father Hoop; but that, at the last instant, I should perhaps purchase the happiness of living again by a thousand, nay, ten thousand, years of hell. Ah, my dear, if I thought that I should see you again, I should soon persuade myself of what a daughter once succeeded in persuading her father on his deathbed. He was an old usurer; a priest had sworn to him that he would be damned unless he made restitution. He resolved to comply, and calling his daughter to his bedside, said to her: 'My child, you thought I should leave you very rich, and so I should; but the man there insists that I shall burn in hell-fire for ever, if I die without making restitution.' 'You are talking nonsense, father, with your restitution and your damnation,' the daughter answered; 'with your character I you will not have been damned ten years, before you will be perfectly used to it.'

“This struck him as true, and he died without making restitution.

“And so behold us launched into a discussion on life and death, on the world and its alleged Creator.

“Some one remarked that whether there be a God or no, it is impossible to introduce that device either into nature or into a discussion without darkening it.

“Another said that if a single supposition explained all the phenomena, it would not follow from this that it is true; for who knows whether the general order only allows of one reason? What, then, must we think of a supposition which, so far from resolving the one difficulty for the sake of which people imagined it, only makes an infinity of others spring up from it?

“I believe, my dear, that our chat by the fireside still amuses you; so I go on.

“Among these difficulties is one that has been proposed ever since the world has been a world; ’tis that men suffer without having deserved suffering. There has been no answer to it yet. ’Tis the incompatibility of physical and moral evil with the nature of the Eternal Being. This is how the dilemma is put: it is either impotence or bad will; impotence, if he wished to hinder evil and could not; bad will, if he could have hindered it and did not will it. A child would understand that. It is this that has led people to imagine the fault of the first father of us all, original sin, future rewards and punishments, the incarnation, immortality, the two principles of the Manicheans, the Ormuzd and Ahriman of the Persians, the doctrine of emanations, the empire of light and darkness, metempsychosis, optimism, and other absurdities that have found credit among the different nations of the earth, where there is always to be found some hollow vision of a dream, by way of answer to a clear, precise, and definite fact.

“On such occasions what is the part of good sense? Why, the part that we took: whatever the optimists may say, we will reply to them that if the universe could not exist without sensible creatures, nor sensible creatures without pain, there was nothing to do but to leave chaos at peace. They had got on very well for a whole eternity without any such piece of folly.

“The world a piece of folly! Ah, my dear, a glorious folly for all that! ’Tis, according to some of the inhabitants of Malabar, one of the seventy-four comedies with which the Eternal amuses himself.

“Leibnitz, the founder of optimism, tells somewhere how there was in the Temple of Memphis a high pyramid of globes placed one above the others; how a priest, being asked by a traveller about this pyramid and its globes, made answer that these were all the possible worlds, and that the most perfect of them all was at the summit; how the traveller, curious to see this most perfect of all possible worlds, mounted to the top of the pyramid, and the first thing that caught his eyes, as they turned towards the globe at the summit, was Tarquin outraging Lucretia.”[221]

Almost every letter reminds us that we are in the very height of the disputing, arguing, rationalistic century. Diderot delighted in this kind of argument, as Socrates or Dr. Johnson delighted in it. He was above all others the archetype and representative of the passion for moralising, analysing, and philosophising which made the epoch what it was; but the rest of the world was all in the same vein. If he came to Paris in a coach from the country, he found a young lady in it, eager to demonstrate that serious passions are nowadays merely ridiculous; that people only promise themselves pleasure, which they find or not, as the case may be; that thus they spare themselves all the broken oaths of old days. “I took the liberty of saying that I was still a man of those old days. ‘*So much the worse for you*,’ she said, ‘*you either deceive or are deceived, and one is as bad as the other*.’”[222] If Grimm and Madame d’Epinay and he were together, they

discussed ethics from morning to night; Diderot always on the side of the view that made most for the dignity and worth of human nature. Grimm is described on one of these occasions as having rather displeased Madame d'Epinay: "He was not sufficiently ready to disapprove the remark of a man of our acquaintance, who said that it was right to observe the most scrupulous probity with one's friends, but that it was mere dupery to treat other people better than they would treat us. We maintained, she and I, that it was right and necessary to be honest and good with all the world without distinction."[223]

Here is another picture of discussion, with an introduction that is thoroughly characteristic of Diderot's temper:

"This man looks at the human race only on its dark side. He does not believe in virtuous actions; he disparages them, and denies them. If he tells a story, it is always about something scandalous and abominable. I have just told you of the two women of my acquaintance, of whom he took occasion to speak as ill as he could to Madame Le Gendre. They have their defects, no doubt; but they have also their good qualities. Why be silent about the good qualities, and only pick out the defects? There is in all that a kind of envy that wounds me — me who read men as I read authors, and who never burden my memory except with things that are good to know and good to imitate. The conversation between Suard and Madame Le Gendre had been very vivacious. They sought the reasons why persons of sensibility were so readily, so strongly, so deliciously moved at the story of a good action. Suard maintained that it was due to a sixth sense that nature had endowed us with, to judge the good and the beautiful. They pressed to know what I thought of it. I answered that this sixth sense was a chimæra; that all was the result of experience in us; that we learnt from our earliest infancy what it was in our instinct to hide or to show. When the motives of our actions, our judgments, our demonstrations, are present to us, we have what is called

science; when they are not present to our memory, we have only what is called taste, instinct, and tact. The reasons for showing ourselves sensible to the recital of good actions are numberless: we reveal a quality that is worthy of infinite esteem; we promise to others our esteem, if ever they deserve it by any uncommon or worthy piece of conduct.... Independently of all these views of interest, we have a notion of order, and a taste for order, which we cannot resist, and which drags us along in spite of ourselves. Every fine action implies sacrifice; and it is impossible for us not to pay our homage to self-sacrifice" — and so forth.[224]

Alas, all these endless debates and dialogues lacked the inspiration and the charm with which the genius of a Plato could adorn the narrowest quibble between Socrates and a Sophist. "Diderot," said Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, "is an extraordinary man; he is out of his place in society; he was meant for the chief of a sect, a Greek philosopher, instructing youth. He pleases me greatly, but his manner does not touch my soul."[225] And we understand this. People disputed what virtue is, but the dispute failed in that undefined spirit which makes men love and adore virtue. Goodness is surrounded with no spacious beauty, it is clothed with none of the high associations of spontaneous piety. The discussion seems close, stifling, and airless. Yet ages of loftier speech and greater spirituality have not always been so favourable to the affections or to the attachments of life. In amiability that society has never been surpassed; in sincerity of mutual sympathy and kindliness of mutual regard. The common irregularity of morals was seen to be perfectly compatible not merely with a desire to please, but with an honest anxiety to serve.

Of the thorough excellence of Diderot's heart, of his friendliness and unwearied helpfulness, time would fail us to tell. Men's conceptions of friendship differ as widely as their conceptions of other things. Some look to friendship for absolute exemption from all criticism, and for a mutual

admiration without limit or conditions. Others mistake it for the right of excessive criticism, in season and out of season.

Diderot was content to take friendship as the right, the duty, or the privilege of rendering services, without thought of requiring either them, or gratitude for them, back in return. This we must confess to be rare. No man that ever lived showed more sterling interest in furthering the affairs of others around him. He seemed to admit every claim on his time, his purse, and his talents. A stranger called upon him one day, and begged Diderot to write for him a puffing advertisement of a new pomatum. Diderot with a laugh sat down and wrote what was wanted. The graver occasions of life found him no less ready. Damilaville lost one of his children, and his wife was inconsolable. It was Diderot who was summoned, and who cheerfully went for days together to soothe and divert her mind. For his correspondent and for us he makes the tedium of his story beautiful by recalling the fine saying of a grief-stricken woman in Metastasio, when they tried to console her by the example of Abraham, who was ready even to slay his son at the command of God: *Ah, God would never have given such an order to his mother!*

The abbé Le Monnier wrote the worst verses that ever were read, a play that was instantly damned, and a translation of Terence that came into the world dead. But bad writers are always the most shameless intruders on the time of good critics, and we find Diderot willingly spending hours over the abbé's handwriting, which was as wretched as what he wrote, and then spending hours more in offering critical observations on verses that were only fit to be thrown into the fire. The abbé, being absent from Paris and falling short of money, requested Diderot to sell for him his copy of the Encyclopædia. "I have sold your Encyclopædia," said Diderot, "but did not get so much as I expected, for the rumour spread abroad by those scoundrels of Swiss booksellers, that they were going to issue a revised

edition, has done us some harm. Send for the nine hundred and fifty livres (about £40) that belong to you, and if that is not enough for your expenses, besides the drawer that holds your money is another that holds mine. I don't know how much there is, but I will count it all at your disposal."[226]

One Jodin, again, was a literary hack who had been employed on the Encyclopædia. He died, leaving a foolish and extravagant widow, and a perverse and violent daughter. The latter went on to the stage, and Diderot took as much trouble in advising her, in seeking appointments for her, in executing her commissions, in investing her earnings, in dealing with her relatives, as if he had been her own father. If his counsels on her art are admirable, there is something that moves us with more than admiration in the good sense, the right feeling, the worthiness of his counsels on conduct. And Diderot did not merely moralise at large. All that he says is real, pointed, and apt for circumstance and person. The petulant damsel to whom they were addressed would not be likely to yawn over the sharp remonstrances, the vigorous plain speaking, the downright honesty and visible sincerity of his friendliness. It appears that she had sense enough not to be offended with the frankness of her father's old employer, for after he has plainly told her that she is violent, rude, vain, and not always too truthful, she still writes to him from Warsaw, from Dresden, from Bordeaux, praying him to procure a certain bracelet for her, to arrange her mother's affairs, to find a good investment for twelve thousand francs. When the mother was in the depths of indigence, Diderot insisted that she should take her meals at his own table. And all this for no other reason than that the troublesome pair had been thrown in his way by the chance of human circumstance, and needed help which he was able, not without sacrifice, to give. Mademoiselle Jodin was hardly worthy of so good a friend. Her parents were Protestants, and as she was a convert, she enjoyed a pension of some eight pounds a year. That did not prevent her from one day indulging

in some too sprightly sallies, as the host was carried along the street. For this she was put into prison, and that is our last glimpse of the light creature.[227]

Men knew how to be as wrong-headed and as graceless as women. We have already mentioned the name of Landois in connection with Diderot's article on Liberty. Landois seems to have been a marvel of unreasonableness, but he was a needy man of letters, and that was enough to make Diderot ready to bear with him and to succour him. He wound up an epistle abounding, after the manner of the worthless failures of the world, in reproaches and grievances against his benefactor, with a cool request about a manuscript that was full of dangerous matter. "Why, that," replied Diderot, "is a work that might well be the ruin of me! And it is after you have on two separate occasions charged me with the most atrocious and deliberate offences towards you, that you now propose that I should revise and print your work! You know that I have a wife and child, that I am a marked man, that you are putting me into the class of hardened offenders; never mind, you don't think of one of these things. You take me for an imbecile, or else you are one. But you are no imbecile.... I see through men's designs, and often enough I lend myself to them, without deigning to disabuse them as to the stupidity which they impute to me. It is enough if I perceive in their design some great service for them, and not an excess of inconvenience for myself. It is not I who am the fool, so often as people take me for one." Diderot then seems half to forget to whom he is writing and pours out what reads like a long soliloquy on morals, conduct, and the philosophy of life. He insists that man, with all his high-flying freedom of will, is but a little link in a great chain of events. He is a creature to be modified from without; hence the good effects of example, discourse, education, pleasures, pains, greatness, misery. Hence a sort of philosophy of commiseration, which attaches us strongly to the good, and irritates us no

more against the bad than against a wind-storm that fills our eyes with dust. If you adopt such principles as these, they will reconcile you with others and yourself; you will neither praise nor blame yourself for what you are. To reproach others with nothing, to repent yourself of nothing — these are the two first steps towards wisdom; this is the philosophy that reconciles us with the human race and with life.[228]

When he was in the very midst of all the toil and strife that the Encyclopædia brought upon him, he could not refuse to spend three whole days in working like a galley-slave at an account of an important discovery that had been made by some worthy people with whom he was acquainted slightly. "But while I was busy about their affairs, my own are at a standstill. I write to you from Le Breton's, with a mass of uncorrected proofs before me, and the printers crying out for them. Still Grimm must be right, when he says that time is not a thing of which we are free to dispose at our own fancy; that we owe it first and foremost to our friends, our relations, our daily duties; and that in the lavish profusion of our time on people who are indifferent, there is nothing less than vice."[229] Yet in spite of Grimm's most just remonstrance, the lavish profusion always went on as before.

There was one man, and only one man, for whose perverse and intractable spirit Diderot's most friendly patience, helpfulness, and devotion, were no match. I have already, in dealing with Rousseau,[230] said as much of the quarrel which he picked with Diderot as the matter requires, and it would be superfluous to go over the ground again from another side. Whether we listen to Rousseau's story or to Diderot's story, our judgment on what happened remains unchanged. We have already seen how warm and close an intimacy subsisted between them in the days when Diderot was a prisoner at Vincennes (1749). When Rousseau made up his mind to leave Paris and turn hermit (1756), there was a loud outcry from the social group

at Holbach's. They said to him, in the least theological dialect of their day, what Sir Walter Scott had said to Ballantyne when Ballantyne thought of leaving Edinburgh, that, "when our Saviour himself was to be led into temptation, the first thing the Devil thought of was to get him into the wilderness." Diderot remonstrated rather more loudly than Rousseau's other friends, but there was no breach, and even no coolness. What sort of humours were bred by solitude in Rousseau's wayward mind we know, and the Confessions tell us how for a year and a half he was silently brooding over fancied slights and perhaps real pieces of heedlessness. Grimm, who was Diderot's closest friend next to Mademoiselle Voland, despised Rousseau, and Rousseau detested Grimm. "Grimm," he one day said to a disciple, "is the only man whom I have ever been able to hate." Madame d'Epinay was compelled to go to Geneva for her health, and Grimm easily persuaded Diderot that Rousseau was bound by all the ties of gratitude to accompany his benefactress on the expedition. Diderot wrote to the hermit a very strong letter to this effect: it made Rousseau furious. He declined the urgent counsel, he quarrelled outright and violently with Grimm, and after an angry and confusing interview with Diderot, all intercourse ceased with him also. "That man," wrote Diderot, on the evening of this, their last interview, "intrudes into my work; he fills me with trouble, and I feel as if I were haunted by a damned soul at my side. May I never see him more; he would make me believe in devils and hell."[231] And writing afterwards to some friend at Geneva, he recalls the days when he used to pour out the talk of intimacy "with the man who has buried himself at the bottom of a wood, where his soul has been soured and his moral nature has been corrupted. Yet how I pity him! Imagine that I used to love him, that I remember those old days of friendship, and that I see him now with crime on one side and remorse on the other, with deep waters in front of him. He will many a time be the torment of my thought; our common friends have judged between

him and me; I have kept them all, and to him there remains not one."[232] It was not in Diderot's nature to bear malice, and when eight years later Rousseau passed through Paris on his ill-starred way to England and the

Derbyshire hills, Diderot described the great pleasure that a visit from Rousseau would give to him. "Ah, I do well," he says, "not to let the access to my heart be too easy; when anybody has once found a place in it, he does not leave it without making a grievous rent; 'tis a wound that can never be thoroughly cauterised."[233]

It is needless to remind the neutral reader that Rousseau uses exactly the same kind of language about his heart. For this is the worst of sentimentalism, that it is so readily bent into a substitution of indulgence to oneself for upright and manly judgment about others. Still we may willingly grant that in the present rupture of a long friendship, it was not Diderot who was the real offender. *Too many honest people would be in the wrong*, he most truly said, *if Jean Jacques were in the right*.

Of Grimm, I have already said elsewhere as much as is needful to be said.[234] His judgment in matters of conduct and character was cool and rather hard, but it was generally sound. He had a keen eye for what was hollow in the pretensions of the society in which he lived. Above all, he had the keen eye of his countrymen for his own interest, and for the use which he could make of other people. The best thing that we know in his favour, is that he should have won the friendship of Diderot. Diderot's attachment to Grimm seems like an exaggeration of the excesses of the epoch of sentimentalism in Germany.

He pines for a letter from him, as he pined for letters from Mademoiselle Voland. If Grimm had been absent for a few months, their meeting was like a scene in a melodrama. "With what ardour we enclasped one another. My heart was swimming. I could not speak a word, nor could he. We embraced without speaking, and I shed tears. We were not expecting him. We were all

at dessert when he was announced, *'Here is M. Grimm.'* '*M. Grimm*,' I exclaimed, with a loud cry; and starting up, I ran to him and fell on his neck. He sat down, and ate a poor meal, you may be sure. As for me, I could not open my lips either to eat or to speak. He was next to me, and I kept pressing his hand and gazing at him."[235] Mademoiselle Voland appears on some occasion to have compared Diderot with his friend. "No more comparison, I beseech you, my good friend, between Grimm and me. I console myself for his superiority by frankly recognising it. I am vain of the victory that I thus gain over my self-love, and you must not deprive me of that little advantage."[236] Grimm, however, knew better than Diderot how to unite German sentimentalism with a steady selfishness. "I have just received from Grimm," writes good-natured Diderot, "a note that wounds my too sensitive spirit. I had promised to write him a few lines on the exhibition of pictures in the Salon; he writes to me that if it is not ready to-morrow, it will be of no use. I will be revenged for this kind of hardness, and in a way that becomes me. I worked all day yesterday, and all day to-day. I shall pass the night at work, and all to-morrow, and at nine o'clock he shall receive a volume of manuscript."[237] We may doubt whether his German friend would feel the force of a rebuke so extremely convenient to himself.

While Grimm was amusing himself at Madame d'Epinay's country house, Diderot was working at the literary correspondence which Grimm was accustomed to send to St. Petersburg and the courts of Germany. While Grimm was hunting pensions and honorary titles at Saxe-Gotha, or currying favour with Frederick and waiting for gold boxes at Potsdam, Diderot was labouring like any journeyman in writing on his behalf accounts and reviews of the books, good, bad, and indifferent, with which the Paris market teemed. When there were no new books to talk about, the ingenious man, with the resource of the born journalist, gave extracts from books that

did not exist.[238] When we hear of Paris being the centre of European intelligence and literary activity, we may understand that these circular letters of Grimm and Diderot were the machinery by which the light of Paris was diffused among darker lands. It is not too much to say that no contemporary record so intelligent, so independent, so vigorous, so complete, exists of any other remarkable literary epoch.

The abbé Raynal, of whom we shall have more to say in a later chapter, had founded this counterpart of a modern review in 1747, and he sent a copy of it in manuscript once a month to anybody who cared to pay three hundred francs a year. In 1753 Raynal had handed the business over to Grimm, and by him it was continued until 1790, twelve years beyond the life of Voltaire and of Rousseau, and six years after the death of the ablest, most original, and most ungrudging of all those who gave him their help.

An interesting episode in Diderot's life brought him into direct relations with one of the two crowned patrons of the revolutionary literature, who were philosophers in profession and the most arbitrary of despots in their practice. Frederick the Great, whose literary taste was wholly in the vein of the conventional French classic, was never much interested by Diderot's writing, and felt little curiosity about him. Catherine of Russia was sufficiently an admirer of the Encyclopædia to be willing to serve its much-enduring builder. In 1765, when the enterprise was in full course, Diderot was moved by a provident anxiety about the future of his daughter. He had no dower for her in case a suitor should present himself, and he had but a scanty substance to leave her in case of his own death. The income of the property which he inherited from his father was regularly handed to his wife for the maintenance of the household. His own earnings, as we have seen, were of no considerable amount. There are men of letters, he wrote in 1767, to whom their industry has brought as much as twenty, thirty, eighty, or even a hundred thousand francs. As for himself, he thought that perhaps the

fruit of his literary occupations would come to about forty thousand crowns, or some five thousand pounds sterling. “One could not amass wealth,” he said pensively, and his words are of grievous generality for the literary tribe, “but one could acquire ease and comfort, if only these sums were not spread over so many years, did not vanish away as they were gathered in, and had not all been scattered and spent by the time that years had multiplied, wants, grown more numerous, eyes grown dim, and mind become blunted and worn.”[239] This was his own case. His earnings were never thriftily husbanded. Diderot could not deny himself a book or an engraving that struck his fancy, though he was quite willing to make a present of it to any appreciative admirer the day after he had bought it. He was extravagant in hiring a hackney-coach where another person would have gone on foot, and not seldom the coachman stood for half a day at the door, while the heedless passenger was expatiating within upon truth, virtue, and the fine arts, unconscious of the passing hours and the swollen reckoning. Hence, when the time came, there were no savings. We have to take a man with the defects of his qualities, and as Diderot would not have been Diderot if he had taken time to save money, there is no more to be said.

When it became his duty to provide for his daughter, between 1763 and 1765, he resolved to sell his library. Through Grimm, Diderot’s position reached the ears of the Empress of Russia. Her agent was instructed to buy the library at the price fixed by its possessor, and Diderot received sixteen thousand livres, a sum equal to something more than seven hundred pounds sterling of that day. The Empress added a handsome bounty to the bargain. She requested Diderot to consider himself the custodian of the new purchase on her behalf, and to receive a thousand livres a year for his pains. The salary was paid for fifty years in advance, and so Diderot drew at once what must have seemed to him the royal sum of between two and three thousand pounds sterling — a figure that would have to be trebled, or

perhaps quadrupled, to convey its value in the money of our own day. We may wish for the honour of letters that Diderot had been able to preserve his independence. But pensions were the custom of the time. Voltaire, though a man of solid wealth, did not disdain an allowance from Frederick the Great, and complained shrilly because it was irregularly paid at the very time when he knew that Frederick was so short of money that he was driven to melt his plate. D'Alembert also had his pension from Berlin, and Grimm, as we have seen, picked up unconsidered trifles in half of the northern courts. Frederick offered an allowance to Rousseau, but that strange man, in whom so much that was simple, touching, and lofty, mingled with all that was wayward and perverse, declined to tax the king's strained finances.[240]

It would shed an instructive light upon authorship and the characters of famous men, if we could always know the relations between a writer and his booksellers. Diderot's point of view in considering the great modern enginery and processes of producing and selling books, was invariably, like his practice, that of a man of sound common sense and sterling integrity. We have seen in the previous chapter something of the difficulties of the trade in those days. The booksellers were a close guild of three hundred and sixty members, and the printers were limited to thirty-six. Their privileges brought them little fortune. They were of the lowest credit and repute, and most of them were hardly better than beggars. It was said that not a dozen out of the three hundred and sixty could afford to have more than one coat for his back. They were bound hand and foot by vexatious rules, and their market was gradually spoiled by a band of men whom they hated as interlopers, but whom the public had some reason to bless. No bookseller nor printer could open an establishment outside of the quarter of the University, or on the north side of the bridges. The restriction, which was as old as the introduction of printing into France, had its origin in the days when the visits of the royal inspectors to the presses and bookshops were

constant and rigorous, and it saved the time of the officials to have all their business close to their hand. Inasmuch, however, as people insisted on having books, and as they did not always choose to be at the pains of making a long journey to the region of the booksellers' shops, hawkers sprang into existence. Men bought books or got them on credit from the booksellers, and carried them in a bag over their shoulders to the houses of likely customers, just as a peddler now carries laces and calico, cheap silks and trumpory jewellery, round the country villages. Even poor women filled their aprons with a few books, took them across the bridges, and knocked at people's doors. This would have been well enough in the eyes of the guild, if the hawkers had been content to buy from the legally patented booksellers. But they began secretly to turn publishers in a small way on their own account. Contraband was here, as always, the natural substitute for free trade. They both issued pirated editions of their own, and they became the great purchasers and distributors of the pirated editions that came in vast bales from Switzerland, from Holland, from the Pope's country of Avignon. To their craft or courage the public owed its copies of works whose circulation was forbidden by the government. The Persian Letters of Montesquieu was a prohibited book, but, for all that, there were a hundred editions of it before it had been published twenty years, and every schoolboy could find a copy on the quays for a dozen halfpence. Bayle's Thoughts on the Comet, Rousseau's Emilius and Heloïsa, Helvétius's L'Esprit, and a thousand other forbidden pieces were in every library, both public and private. The Social Contract, printed over and over again in endless editions, was sold for a shilling under the vestibule of the king's own palace. When the police were in earnest, the hawker ran horrible risks, as we saw a few pages further back; for these risks he recompensed himself by his prices. A prohibition by the authorities would send a book up within four-and-twenty hours from half a crown to a couple of louis. This only

increased the public curiosity, quickened the demand, led to clandestine reprints, and extended the circulation of the book that was nominally suppressed. When the condemnation of a book was cried through the streets, the compositors said, “Good, another edition!” There was no favour that an unknown author could have asked from the magistrates so valuable to him as a little decree condemning his work to be torn up and burnt at the foot of the great staircase of the Palace of Justice.[241]

It was this practical impossibility of suppression that interested both the guild of publishers and the government in the conditions of the book trade. The former were always harassed, often kept poor, and sometimes ruined, by systematic piracy and the invasion of their rights. The government, on the other hand, could not help seeing that, as the books could not possibly be kept out of the realm, it was to be regretted that their production conferred no benefit on the manufacturing industry of the realm, the composition, the printing, the casting of type, the fabrication of paper, the preparation of leather and vellum, the making of machines and tools. When Bayle’s Dictionary appeared, it was the rage of Europe. Hundreds of the ever-renowned folios found their way into France, and were paid for by French money. The booksellers addressed the minister, and easily persuaded him of the difference, according to the economic light of those days, between an exchange of money against paper, compared with an exchange of paper against paper. The minister replied that this was true, but still that the gates of the kingdom would never be opened to a single copy of Bayle. “The best thing to do,” he said, “is to print it here.” And the third edition of Bayle was printed in France, much to the contentment of the French printers, binders, and booksellers.

In 1761 the booksellers were afflicted by a new alarm. Foreign pirates and domestic hawkers were doing them mischief enough. But in that year the government struck a blow at the very principle of literary property. The

King’s Council conferred upon the descendants of La Fontaine the exclusive privilege of publishing their ancestor’s works. That is to say, the Council took away without compensation from La Fontaine’s publishers a copyright for which they had paid in hard cash. The whole corporation naturally rose in arms, and in due time the lieutenant of police was obliged to take the whole matter into serious consideration — whether the maintenance of the guild of publishers was expedient; whether the royal privilege of publishing a book should be regarded as conferring a definite and unassailable right of property in the publication; whether the tacit permission to publish what it would have been thought unbecoming to authorise expressly by royal sanction, should not be granted liberally or even universally; and whether the old restriction of the booksellers to one quarter of the town ought to remain in force any longer. M. de Sartine invited Diderot to write him a memorandum on the subject, and was disappointed to find Diderot staunchly on the side of the booksellers (1767). He makes no secret, indeed, that for his own part he would like to see the whole apparatus of restraint abolished, but meanwhile he is strong for doing all that a system of regulation, as opposed to a system of freedom, can do to make the publication of books a source of prosperity to the bookseller, and of cheap acquisition to the book-buyer. Above all things, Diderot is vehemently in favour of the recognition of literary property, and against such infringement of it as had been ventured upon in the case of La Fontaine. He had no reason to be especially friendly to booksellers, but for one thing, he saw that to nullify or to tamper with copyright was in effect to prevent an author from having any commodity to sell, and so to do him the most serious injury possible. And for another thing, Diderot had equity and common sense enough to see that no high-flown nonsense about the dignity of letters and the spiritual power could touch the fact that a book is a piece of marketable ware, and that the men who deal in such wares have as much

claim to be protected in their contracts as those who deal in any other wares.[242]

There is a vivid illustration of this unexpected business-like quality in Diderot, in a conversation that he once had with D'Alembert. The dialogue is interesting to those who happen to be curious as to the characters of two famous men. It was in 1759, when D'Alembert was tired of the Encyclopædia, and was for making hard terms as the condition of his return to it. "If," said Diderot to him, "six months ago, when we met to deliberate on the continuation of the work, you had then proposed these terms, the booksellers would have closed with them on the spot, but now, when they have the strongest reasons to be out of humour with you, that is another thing."

"And pray, what reasons?"

"Can you ask me?"

"Certainly."

"Then I will tell you. You have a bargain with the booksellers; the terms are stipulated; you have nothing to ask beyond them. If you worked harder than you were bound to do, that was out of your interest in the book, out of friendship to me, out of respect for yourself; people do not pay in money for such motives as these. Still they sent you twenty louis a volume: that makes a hundred and forty louis that you had beyond what was due to you. You plan a journey to Wesel [in 1752, to meet Frederick of Prussia] at a time when you were wanted by them here; they do not detain you; on the contrary, you are short of money, and they supply you. You accept a couple of hundred louis; this debt you forget for two or three years. At the end of that rather long term you bethink you of paying. What do they do? They hand you back your note of hand torn up, with all the air of being very glad to have served you. Then, after all, you turn your back on an undertaking in which they have embarked their whole fortunes: an affair of a couple of

millions is a trifle unworthy of the attention of a philosopher like you.... But that is not all. You have a fancy for collecting together different pieces scattered through the Encyclopædia; nothing can be more opposed to their interests; they put this to you, you insist, the edition is produced, they advance the cost, you share the profits. It seemed that, after having thus twice paid you for their work, they had a right to look upon it as theirs. Yet you go in search of a bookseller in some quite different direction, and sell him in a mass what does not belong to you."

"They gave me a thousand grounds for dissatisfaction."

"*Quelle défaite!* There are no small things between friends. Everything weighs, because friendship is a commerce of purity and delicacy; but are the booksellers your friends? Then your behaviour to them is horrible. If not, then you have nothing to say against them. If the public were called upon to judge between you and them, my friend, you would be covered with shame."

"What, can it be you, Diderot, who thus take the side of the booksellers?"

"My grievances against them do not prevent me from seeing their grievances against you. After all this show of pride, confess now that you are cutting a very sorry figure?"[243]

All this was the language of good sense, and there is no evidence that Diderot ever swerved from that fair and honourable attitude in his own dealings with the booksellers. Yet he was able to treat them with a sturdy spirit when they forgot themselves. Panckoucke, one of the great publishers of the time, came to him one day. "He was swollen with the arrogance of a parvenu, and thinking apparently that he could use me like one of those poor devils who depend upon him for a crust of bread, he permitted himself to fly into a passion; but it did not succeed at all. I let him go on as he pleased; then I got up abruptly, I took him by the arm, and I said to him: 'M.

Panckoucke, in whatever place it may be, in the street, in church, in a bad house, and to whomsoever it may be, it is always right to keep a civil tongue in one's head. But that is all the more necessary still, when you speak to a man who has as little patience as I have, and that, too, in his own house. Go to the devil, you and your work. If you would give me twenty thousand louis, and I could do your business for you in the twinkling of an eye, I would not stir a finger. Be kind enough to be off."[244]

Before returning from the author to his books, it is interesting to know how he and his circle appeared at this period to some who did not belong to them. Gibbon, for instance, visited Paris in the spring of 1763. "The moment," he says, "was happily chosen. At the close of a successful war the British name was respected on the continent; *clarum et venerabile nomen gentibus*. Our opinions, our fashions, even our games were adopted in France, a ray of national glory illuminated each individual, and every Englishman was supposed to be born a patriot and philosopher." He mentions D'Alembert and Diderot as those among the men of letters whom he saw, who "held the foremost rank in merit, or at least in fame."[245]

Horace Walpole was often in Paris, and often saw the philosophic circle, but it did not please his supercilious humour.

"There was no soul in Paris but philosophers, whom I wished in heaven, though they do not wish themselves so. They are so overbearing and underbred.... I sometimes go to Baron d'Holbach's, but I have left off his dinners, as there was no bearing the authors and philosophers and savants of which he has a pigeon-house full. They soon turned my head with a system of antediluvian deluges which they have invented to prove the eternity of matter.... In short, nonsense for nonsense, I liked the Jesuits better than the philosophers."[246]

Hume, as everybody knows, found "the men of letters really very agreeable; all of them men of the world, living in entire, or almost entire

harmony, among themselves, and quite irreproachable in their morals." He places Diderot among those whose person and conversation he liked best.

We have always heard much of the power of the Salon in the eighteenth century, and it was no doubt a remarkable proof of the incorporation of intellectual interests in manners, that so many groups of men and women should have met habitually every week for the purpose of conversing about the new books and new plays, the fresh principles and fresh ideas, that were produced by the incessant vivacity of the time. The Salon of the eighteenth century passed through various phases; its character shifted with the intellectual mood of the day, but in all its phases it was an institution in which women occupied a place that they have never acquired in any society out of France. We are not here called upon to speculate as to the reasons for this; it is only worth remarking that Diderot was not commonly at his ease in the society of ladies, and that though he was a visitor at Madame Geoffrin's and at Mademoiselle Lespinasse's, yet he was not a constant attendant at any of the famous circles of which women had made themselves the centre. The reader of Madame d'Epinay's memoir is informed how hard she found it to tame Diderot into sociability. "What a pity," she exclaims, "that men of genius and of such eminent merit as M. Diderot should thus wrap themselves up in their philosophy, and disdain the homage that people would eagerly pay them in any society that they would honour with their presence."[247] One of the soundest social observers of the time was undoubtedly Duclos. His *Considerations on the Manners of the Century*, which was published in 1751, abounds in admirable criticism. He makes two remarks with which we may close our chapter. "The relaxation of morals does not prevent people from being very loud in praise of honour and virtue; those who have least of them know very well how much they are concerned in other people having them." Again, "The French," he said, "are

the only people among whom it is possible for morals to be depraved, without either the heart being corrupted, or their courage being weakened."

CHAPTER VII. THE STAGE.



THERE IS AT first something incredible in the account given by some thinkers of Diderot, as the greatest genius of the eighteenth century; and perhaps an adjustment of such nice degrees of comparison among the high men of the world is at no time very profitable. What is intended by these thoroughgoing panegyrists is that Diderot placed himself at the point of view whence, more comprehensively than was possible from any other, he discerned the long course and the many bearings, the complex faces and the large ramifications, of the huge movement of his day. He seized the great transition at every point, and grasped all the threads that were to be inwoven into the pattern of the new time.

Diderot is in a thousand respects one of the most unsatisfactory of men and of writers. Yet it is hard to deny that to whatever quarter he turned, he caught the rising illumination and was shone upon by the spirit of the coming day. It was no copious and overflowing radiance, but they were the beams of the dawn. Hence, what he has to say, and we shall soon see how much he said, about the two great arts of painting and the drama, though it is fragmentary, though it is insufficient, yet points, as all the rest of his thoughts pointed, along the lines that the best minds of the western world have since traversed. He would, in the old metaphysical language, have called the direction of it a turning to Nature, but if we translate this into more positive terms, just as we have said that the Encyclopædia was a glorification of pacific industry and of civil justice, so we may say that his whole theory of the drama was a glorification of private virtues and domestic life. And the definite rise of civil justice and industry over feudal privilege and a life of war, and again the elevation of domestic virtue into the place formerly held by patriotic devotion, are the two great sides of a

single movement.[248] It is quite true that Diderot and the French of that day had only a glimpse of the promised land in art and poetry. The whole moral energy of the generation after Diderot was drawn inevitably into the strong current of social action. The freshly kindled torch of dramatic art passed for nearly half a century to the country of Lessing and Goethe.

There is in the use of a certain kind of abstract language this inconvenience, that the reader may suppose us to be imputing to Diderot a deliberate and systematic survey of the whole movement of his time, and a calculated resolution to further it, now in this way and now in that. It is not necessary to suppose that the movement as a whole was always present to him. Diderot's mind was constantly feeling for explanations; it was never a passive recipient. The drama excited this alert interest just as everything else excited it. He thought about that, as about everything else, originally, that is to say, sincerely and in the spirit of reality.[249] Whoever turns with a clear eye and proper intellectual capacity in search of the real bearings of what he is about, is sure to find out the strong currents of the time, even though he may never consciously throw them into their most general and abstract expression.

Since Aristotle, said Lessing, no more philosophical mind than Diderot's has treated of the theatre. Lessing himself translated Diderot's two plays, and the Essay on Dramatic Poetry, and repeatedly said that without the impulse of Diderot's principles and illustrations his own taste would have taken a different direction. As a dramatist, the author of *Miss Sara Sampson*, of *Emilia Galotti*, and above all that noble dramatic poem, *Nathan the Wise*, could hardly have owed much to the author of such poor stuff as *The Natural Son* and *The Father of the Family*. Lessing had some dramatic fire, invention, spontaneous elevation; he had a certain measure, though not a very large one, of poetic impulse. Diderot had nothing of all these, but he had the eye of the philosophic critic.

Any one who reads Lessing's dramatic criticisms will see that he did not at all overrate his obligations to his French contemporary.[250] It has been replied to the absurd taunt about the French inventing nothing, that at least Descartes invented German philosophy. Still more true is it that Diderot invented German criticism.

Diderot's thoughts on the stage, besides his completed plays, and a number of fragmentary scenes, are contained principally in the Paradox on the Player, a short treatise on Dramatic Poetry, and three dialogues appended to *The Natural Son*. On the plays a very few words will suffice. *The Natural Son* must, by me at least, be pronounced one of the most vapid performances in dramatic history. Even Lessing, unwilling as he was to say a word against a writer who had taught him so much, is too good a critic not to recognise monotony in the characters, stiffness and affectation in the dialogue, and a pedantic ring in the sentences of new-fangled philosophy.[251] Even in the three critical dialogues that Diderot added to the play, Lessing cannot help discerning the mixture of superficiality with an almost pompous pretension. Rosenkranz, it is true, finds the play rich in fine sentences, in scenes full of effect, in which Diderot's moral enthusiasm expresses itself with impetuous eloquence. But even he admits that the hero's servant is not so far wrong when he cries, "*Il semble que le bon sens se soit enfui de cette maison*," and adds that the whole atmosphere of the piece is sickly with conscious virtue.[252] For ourselves we are ready for once even to sympathise with Palissot, the hack-writer of the reactionary parties, when he says that *The Natural Son* had neither invention, nor style, nor characters, nor any other single unit of a truly dramatic work. The reader who seeks to realise the nullity of the *genre sérieux* in Diderot's hands, should turn from *The Natural Son* to Goldoni's play of *The True Friend*, from which Diderot borrowed the structure of his play, following it as narrowly as possible to the end of the third act. Seldom has transfusion turned a sparkling draught

into anything so flat and vapid. In spite of the applause of the philosophic *claque*, led by Grimm,[253] posterity has ratified the coldness with which it was received by contemporaries. *The Natural Son* was written in 1757, but it was not until 1771 that the directors of the French Comedy could be induced to place it on the stage. The actors detested their task, and as we can very well believe, went sulkily through parts which they had not even taken the trouble to master.[254] The public felt as little interest in the piece as the actors had done, and after a single representation, the play was put aside.

Ill-natured critics compared Diderot's play with Rousseau's opera; they insisted that *The Natural Son* and *The Village Conjuror* were a couple of monuments of the presumptuous incompetence of the encyclopædic cabal. The failure of *The Natural Son* as a drama came after it had enjoyed considerable success as a piece of literature, for it had been fourteen years in print. We can only suppose that this success was the fruit of an unflinching partisanship.

It is a curious illustration of the strength of the current passion for moral maxims in season and out of season, that one scene which to the scoffers of that day seemed, as it cannot but seem to everybody to-day, a climax of absurdity and unbecomingness, was hailed by the party as most admirable, for no other reason than that it contained a number of high moralising saws. Constance, a young widow and a model of reason, takes upon herself to combat the resolution of Dorval not to marry, after he has led her to suppose that he has a passion for her, and after a marriage between them has been arranged. "No," he cries, "a man of my character is not such a husband as befits Constance." Constance begs him to reassure himself; tells him that he is mistaken; to enjoy tranquillity, a man must have the approval of his own heart, and perhaps that of other men, and he can have neither unless he remains at his post; it is only the wicked who can bear isolation; a tender

soul cannot view the general system of sensible beings without a strong desire that they should be happy. Dorval, who cuts an extremely sorry figure in such a scene, exclaims, “Ah, but children! Dorval would have children! When I think that we are thrown from our very birth into a chaos of prejudices, extravagances, vices, and miseries, the idea makes me shudder!”— “Dorval, you are beset by phantoms, and no wonder. The history of life is so little known, while the appearance of evil in the universe is so glaring.... Dorval, your daughters will be modest and good; your sons noble and high-minded; all your children will be charming.... There is no fear that a cruel soul should ever grow in my bosom from stock of yours.”[255]

We can hardly wonder that players were disgusted, or critics moved to wicked jests. The counterpart to the scene in which Constance persuades Dorval that they would be very happy in one case, is the scene in which Dorval persuades Rosalie that they would be very unhappy in another case. The situations in themselves may command our approval morally, but they certainly do not attract our sympathies dramatically. That a woman should demonstrate to a man in fine sententious language the expediency of marrying her, is not inconsistent with good sense, but it is displeasing. When a man tells a woman that, though love draws in one way, duty draws in the other, we may admire his prudence, but we are glad when so delicate a business comes to an end. In *The Natural Son* the latter scene, though very long, is the less disagreeable of the two. And just as in Diderot’s most wordy and tiresome pages we generally find some one phrase, some epithet, some turn of a sentence whose freshness or strength or daring reveals a genius, so in this scene we find a few lines whose energy reminds us that we are not after all in the hands of some obscure playwright, whose works ought long ago to have been eaten by moths or burnt by fire. Those lines are a warning against the temptation so familiar in every age since Paris was a guest in the halls of Menelaus, to take that fatal resolve, All for love and the

world well lost. “To do wrong,” says Dorval, “is to condemn ourselves to live and to find our pleasure with wrong-doers; it is to pass an uncertain and troubled life in one long and never-ending lie; to have to praise with a blush the virtue that we flung behind us; to hear from the lips of others harsh words for our own action; to seek a little calm in sophistical systems, that the breath of a single good man scatters to the winds; to shut ourselves for ever out from the spring of true joys, the only joys that are virtuous, austere, sublime; and to give ourselves up, simply as a way of escape from ourselves, to the weariness of those frivolous diversions in which the day flows away in self-oblivion, and our life glides slowly from us and loses itself in waste.”[256] A very old story, no doubt; but natural, true, and in its place.

What adds to the flatness of the play is a device which Diderot introduced on a deliberately adopted principle; we mean the elaborate setting out of the acting directions. Every movement, every gesture, every silent pause is written down, and we have the impression less of a play than of some strangely bald romance. In the versified declamation which then reigned on the French stage, nothing was left to natural action, nothing was told by change of position, by movement without speech, or in short by any means other than discourse. Diderot, repudiating the conventions of dramatic art, and consulting nature or reality, saw that there are many scenes in life in which it is more natural to the personages of the scene to move than to speak, in which indeed motion is natural, and speech is altogether unnatural. If this be so in real life, he said, it should be so on the stage, because nothing passes in the world which may not pass also in the theatre; and as pantomime, or expression of emotion, feeling, purpose, otherwise than by speech, has so much to do in life, the dramatist should make abundant use of pantomime in composing stage-plays. Nor should he trust to the actor’s invention and spontaneous sense of appropriateness. He

ought to write down the pantomime whenever it adds energy or clearness to the dialogue; when it binds the parts of the dialogue together; when it consists in a delicate play that is not easily divined; and almost always he ought to write it down in the opening of a scene. If any one is inclined to regard this as superfluous, let him try the experiment of composing a play, and then writing the pantomime, or "business," for it; he will soon see what follies he commits.[257]

Whatever we may think of the practice of writing the action as well as the words for the player, nobody would now dispute the wisdom of what Diderot says as to the part that pantomime fills in the highest kind of dramatic representation. We must agree with his repeated laments over the indigence, for purposes of full and adequate expression, of every language that ever has existed or ever can exist.[258] "My dear master," he wrote to Voltaire on the occasion of a performance of *Tancred*, "if you could have seen Clairon passing across the stage, her knees bending under her, her eyes closed, her arms falling stiff by her side as if they were dead; if you heard the cry that she uttered when she perceives Tancred, you would remain more convinced than ever that silence and pantomime have sometimes a pathos that all the resources of speech can never approach."[259] If we wonder that he should have thought it worth while to lay so much emphasis on what seems so obvious, we have to remember that it did not seem at all obvious to people who were accustomed to the substitution of a mannered and symmetrical declamation for the energetic variety and manifold exuberance of passion and judgment in the daily lives of men.

We have already seen that even when he wrote the Letter on the Deaf and Dumb, Diderot's mind was exercised about gesture as a supplement to discourse. In that Letter he had told a curious story of a bizarre experiment that he was in the habit of making at the theatre. He used to go to the highest seats in the house, thrust his fingers into his ears, and then, to the

astonishment of his neighbours, watch the performance with the sharpest interest. As a constant playgoer, he knew the words of the plays by heart, and what he sought was to isolate the gesture of the performers, and to enjoy and criticise that by itself. He kept his ears tightly stopped, so long as the action and play went well with the words as he remembered them, and he only listened when some discord in gesture made him suppose that he had lost his place. The people around him were more and more amazed as they saw him, notwithstanding his stopped ears, shed copious tears in the pathetic passages. "They could not refrain from hazarding questions, to which I answered coldly, 'that everybody had his own way of listening, and that my way was to stop my ears, so as to understand better' — laughing within myself at the talk to which my oddity gave rise, and still more so at the simplicity of some young people who also put their fingers into their ears to hear after my fashion, and were quite astonished that the plan did not succeed."[260] This was an odd and whimsical way of acting on a conviction which lay deep in Diderot's mind, namely, that language is a very poor, misleading, and utterly inadequate instrument for representing what it professes, and what we stupidly suppose it, to represent. Rousseau had expressed the same kind of feeling when he said that definitions might be good things, if only we did not employ words in making them.

A curious circumstance is worth mentioning in connection with the Three Dialogues appended to *The Natural Son*. Diderot informs his readers that the incidents of *The Natural Son* had actually occurred in real life, and that he knew the personages. In the Dialogues it is assumed that the play had been written by the hero himself, and the hero is the chief speaker. Not a word is said from which the reader would guess that Diderot had borrowed the substance of his plot and some of its least insipid scenes from Goldoni. We can hardly wonder that he was charged with plagiarism. Yet it was not deliberate, we may be sure. When Diderot was strongly seized by

an idea, outer circumstances were as if they did not exist. He was swept up into the clouds. “Diderot is a good and worthy man,” wrote Madame Geoffrin to the King of Poland, “but he has such a bad head, and he is so curiously organised, that he neither sees nor hears what he does see and hear, as the thing really is; he is always like a man who is dreaming, and who thinks all that he has dreamed quite real.”[261]

The Father of the Family, written in 1758, and first acted in 1761, is very superior to *The Natural Son*; it even enjoyed a certain popularity. In Germany it became an established favourite, and in Italy it was only less popular than a piece of Goldoni’s. The French were not quite so easy to please. In 1761 its reception was undoubtedly favourable, and it ran for more than a week. In 1769 it was reproduced, and, according to Diderot’s own account, with enthusiasm. “There was a frightful crowd,” he says, “and people hardly remember such a success. I was surprised at it myself. My friends are at the height of exultation. My daughter came home intoxicated with wonder and delight.” Even Madame Diderot at length grew ashamed at having to confess that she had not seen her husband’s triumph, and throwing aside her horror of the stage, was as deeply moved as every one else.[262]

Notwithstanding this satisfactory degree of success, and though it was performed as late as 1835, the play never struck root in France. It is indeed a play without any real quality or distinction. “Diderot, in his plays,” said Madame de Staël, “put the affectation of nature in the place of the affectation of convention.”[263] The effect is still more disagreeable in the first kind of affectation than the second. *The Father of the Family* is made more endurable than *The Natural Son* by a certain rapidity and fire in the action, and a certain vigour in the characters of the impetuous son (Saint Albin) and the malignant brother-in-law (the Commander). But the dialogue is poor, and the Father of the Family himself is as woolly and mawkish a

figure as is usually made out of benevolent intentions and weak purpose combined. The woes of the heavy father of the stage, where there is no true pathos, but only a sentimental version of it, find us very callous. The language has none of that exquisite grace and flexibility which makes a good French comedy of own day, a piece by Augier, Sandeau, Feuillet, Sardou, so delightful. Diderot was right in urging that there is no reason why a play should be in verse; but then the prose of a play ought to have a point, elegance, and highly-wrought perfection, which shall fill us with a sense of art, though not the art of the poet. Diderot not only did not write comedy in such a style; but he does not even so much as show consciousness that any difference exists between one kind of prose and another. The blurred phrases and clipped sentences of what Diderot would have called Nature, that is to say of real life, are intolerable on the stage. Even he felt this, for his characters, though their dialogue is without wit or finish, are still dull and tame of speech, in a different way from that in which the people whom we may meet are dull and tame. There is an art of a kind, though of an extremely vapid kind.

Again, though he may be right in contending that there is a serious kind of comedy as distinct from that gay comedy which is neighbour to farce — of this we shall see more presently — yet he is certainly wrong in believing that we can willingly endure five acts of serious comedy without a single relieving passage of humour. Contrast of character, where all the characters are realistic and common, is not enough. We crave contrast in the dramatic point of view. We seek occasional change of key. That serious comedy should move a sympathetic tear is reasonable enough; but it is hard to find that it grudges us a single smile. The result of Diderot's method is that the spectator or the reader speedily feels that what he has before him substitutes for dramatic fulness and variety the flat monotony of a homily or a tract. It would be hard to show that there is no true comedy without laughter —

Terence's *Hecyra*, for instance — but Diderot certainly overlooked what Lessing and most other critics saw so clearly, that laughter rightly stirred is one of the most powerful agencies in directing the moral sympathies of the audience, — the very end that Diderot most anxiously sought.

It is mere waste of time to bestow serious criticism on Diderot's two plays, or on the various sketches, outlines, and fragments of scenes with which he amused his very slight dramatic faculty. If we wish to study the masterpieces of French comedy in the eighteenth century, we shall promptly shut up the volumes of Diderot, and turn to the ease and soft gracefulness of Marivaux's *Game of Love and Chance*, to the forcible and concentrated sententiousness of Piron's *Métromanie*, to the salt and racy flavour of Le Sage's *Turcaret*. Gresset, again, and Destouches wrote at least two comedies that were really fit for the stage, and may be read with pleasure to-day. Neither of these compliments can fairly be paid to *The Natural Son* and *The Father of the Family*. Diderot's plays ought to be looked upon merely as sketchy illustrations of a favourite theory; as the rough drawings on the black board with which a professor of the fine arts may accompany a lecture on oil painting.

One radical part of Diderot's dramatic doctrine is wholly condemned by modern criticism; and it is the part which his plays were especially designed to enforce. "It is always," he says, "virtue and virtuous people that a man ought to have in view when he writes. Oh, what good would men gain, if all the arts of imitation proposed one common object, and were one day to unite with the laws in making us love virtue and hate vice. It is for the philosopher to address himself to the poet, the painter, the musician, and to cry to them with all his might: *0 men of genius, to what end has heaven endowed you with gifts*? If they listen to him, speedily will the images of debauch cease to cover the walls of our palaces; our vices will cease to be the organs of crime; and taste and manners will gain. Can we believe that

the action of two old blind people, man and wife, as they sought one another in their aged days, and with tears of tenderness clasped one another's hands and exchanged caresses on the brink of the grave, so to say — that this would not demand the same talent, and would not interest me far more than the spectacle of the violent pleasures with which their senses in all the first freshness of youth were once made drunk?"[264]

The emphasising moralists of Diderot's school never understood that virtue may be made attractive, without pulling the reader or the spectator by the sleeve, and urgently shouting in his ear how attractive virtue is. When *The Heart of Midlothian* appeared (1818), a lady wrote about it as follows: "Of late days, especially since it has been the fashion to write moral and even religious novels, one might almost say of the wise good heroines what a lively girl once said of her well-meaning aunt— 'On my word she is enough to make anybody wicked.' Had this very story been conducted by a common hand, Effie would have attracted all our concern and sympathy, Jeanie only cold approbation. Whereas Jeanie, without youth, beauty, genius, warm passions, or any other novel perfection, is here our object from beginning to end. This is 'enlisting the affections in the cause of virtue' ten times more than ever Richardson did; for whose male and female pedants, all excelling as they are, I never could care half as much as I found myself inclined to do for Jeanie before I finished the first volume."[265]

In other words, you must win us by kindling our sympathy, not by formally commanding our moral approval. To kindle sympathy your personage must be interesting; must touch our pity or wonder or energetic fellow-feeling or sense of moral loveliness, which is a very different thing from touching our mere sense of the distinctions between right and wrong. Direct homily excites no sympathy with the homilist. Deep pensive meditations on the moral puzzles of the world are not at all like didactic discourse. But the Father of the Family was exactly fulfilling Diderot's

notion of dramatic purpose and utility when he talked to his daughter in such a strain as this: “Marriage, my daughter, is a vocation imposed by nature.... He who counts on bliss without alloy knows neither the life of man nor the designs of heaven. If marriage exposes us to cruel pain, it is also the source of the sweetest pleasures. Where are the examples of pure and heartfelt interest, of real tenderness, of inmost confidence, of daily help of griefs divided, of tears mingled, if they be not in marriage? What is there in the world that the good man prefers to his wife? What is there in the world that a father loves more dearly than his children? O sacred bond, if I think of thee, my whole soul is warmed and elevated!”[266]

But these virtuous ejaculations do not warm and elevate us. In such a case words count for nothing. It is actual presentation of beautiful character, and not talk about it, that touches the spectator. It is the association of interesting action with character, that moves us and inspires such better moods as may be within our compass. Diderot, like many other people before and since, sought to make the stage the great moral teacher. That it may become so, is possible. It will not be by imitating the methods of that colossal type of histrionic failure, the church-pulpit. Exhortation in set speeches always has been, and always will be, the feeblest bulwark against the boiling floods of passion that helpless virtue ever invented, and it matters not at all whether the hortatory speeches are placed on the lips of Mr. Talkative, the son of Saywell, or of some tearful dummy labelled the Father of the Family.[267]

Yet one is half ashamed to use hard words about Diderot. He was so modest about his work, so simple and unpretending, so wholly without restless and fretting ambitions, and so generous in his judgment of others. He made his own dramatic experiment, he thought little enough of it; and he was wholly above the hateful vice of sourly disparaging competitors, whether dead or living. He knew that he was himself no master, but he was

manly enough to admire anybody who was nearer to mastery. He was full of unaffected delight at Sedaine's busy and pleasing little comedy, *The Philosopher without knowing it*; it was so simple without being stiff, so eloquent without the shadow of effort or rhetoric. After seeing it, Diderot ran off to the author to embrace him, with many tears of joyful sympathy and gratitude. Sedaine, like Lillo, the author of Diderot's favourite play of *George Barnwell*, was a plain tradesman, and the success of his libretti for comic operas had not spoiled him. He could find no more expansive words for his excited admirer than "*Ah, Monsieur Diderot, que vous étes beau*!"[268] Diderot was just as sensible of the originality and Aristophanic gaiety of Collé's brilliant play, *Truth in Wine*, though Collé detested the philosophic school from Voltaire downwards, and left behind him a bitterly contemptuous account of *The Natural Son*.[269]

Of all comic writers, however, the author of the *Andria* and the *Heautontimorumenos* was Diderot's favourite. The half dozen pages upon Terence, which he threw off while the printer's boy waited in the passage (1762), are one of the most easy, flowing, and delightful of his fragments; there is such appreciation of Terence's suavity and tact, of his just and fine judgment, of his discrimination and character. He admits that Terence had no verve; for that he commends the young poet to Molière or Aristophanes, but as verve was exactly the quality most wanting to Diderot himself, he easily forgave its absence in Terence, and thought it amply replaced by his moderation, his truth, and his fine taste. Colman is praised for translating Terence, for here, says Diderot, is the lesson of which Colman's countrymen stand most in need. The English comic writers have more verve than taste. "Vanbrugh, Wycherley, Congreve, and some others have painted vices and foibles with vigour; it is not either invention or warmth or gaiety or force that is wanting to their pencil, but rather that unity in the drawing, that precision in the stroke, that truth in colouring, which distinguish

portrait from caricature. Especially are they wanting in the art of discerning and seizing those *naïf*, simple, and yet singular movements of character, which always please and astonish, and render the imitation at once true and piquant."[270] Criticism has really nothing to add to these few lines, and if Diderot in his last years read *The School for Scandal*, or *The Rivals*, he would have found no reason to alter his judgment.

One English play had the honour of being translated by Diderot; this was *The Gamester*, not *The Gamester* of Shirley nor of Garrick, but of Edward Moore (1753). It is a good example of the bourgeois tragedy or domestic drama, which Diderot was so eager to see introduced on to the French stage. The infatuation of Beverley, the tears and virtue of Mrs. Beverley, the prudence of Charlotte and the sage devotion of her lover, the sympathetic remorse of Bates, and even the desperation of Stukely, made up a picture of domestic misery and moral sentiment with which Diderot was sure to fall in love. Lillo's

George Barnwell, with its direct and urgent moral, was a still greater favourite, and Diderot compared the scene between Maria and Barnwell in prison to the despair of the *Philocletes* of Sophocles, as the hero is heard shrieking at the mouth of his cavern;[271] just as a more modern critic has thought Lillo's other play, *The Fatal Curiosity*, worthy of comparison with the *Œdipus Tyrannus*.

Diderot's feeling for Shakespeare seems to have been what we might have anticipated from the whole cast of his temperament. One of the scenes which delighted him most was that moment of awe, when Lady Macbeth silently advances down the stage with her eyes closed, and imitates the action of washing her hands, as wondering that "the old man should have so much blood in him." "I know nothing," he exclaims, "so pathetic in discourse as that woman's silence and the movement of her hands. What an image of remorse!"[272]

It was not to be expected that Diderot should indulge in those undiscriminating superlatives about Shakespeare which are common in Shakespeare's country. But he knew enough about him to feel that he was dealing with a giant. "I will not compare Shakespeare," he said, "to the Belvedere Apollo, nor to the Gladiator, nor to Antinous" — he had compared Terence to the Medicean Venus— "but to the Saint Christopher of Notre Dame, an unshapely colossus, rudely carven, but between whose legs we could all pass without our brows touching him."[273] Not very satisfactory recognition perhaps; but the Saint Christopher is better than Voltaire's drunken savage.

It is not every dramatist who treats the art of acting as seriously as the art of composition. The great author of *Wilhelm Meister* is the most remarkable exception to this rule, and Lessing is only second to him. It is hardly possible for a man to be a great dramatist, and it is simply impossible for a man to be a great critic of the drama, who has not seriously studied the rules, aims, and conditions of stage representation. Hazlitt, for instance, has written some admirable pages about the poetry, the imaginative conception, the language, of Shakespeare's plays, but we find his limit when he says that King Lear is so noble a play that he cannot bear to see it acted. As if a play could be fully judged without reference to the conditions of the very object with which it was written. A play is to be criticised as a play, not merely as a poem. The whole structure of a piece depends on the fact that it is to be acted; its striking moments must be great dramatic, not merely beautiful poetic, moments. They must have the intensity of pitch by which the effect of action exceeds the effect of narrative. This intensity is made almost infinitely variable with the variations in the actor's mastery of his art.

Diderot, who threw so penetrating a glance into every subject that he touched, even if it were no more than a glance, has left a number of

excellent remarks on histrionics. The key to them all is his everlasting watchword: *Watch nature, follow her simple, and spontaneous leading*. The Paradox on the Player is one of the very few of Diderot's pieces of which we can say that, besides containing vigorous thought, it has real finish in point of literary form. There is not the flat tone, the heavy stroke, the loose shamble, that give a certain stamp of commonness to so many of his most elaborate discussions. In the Paradox the thoughts seem to fall with rapidity and precision into their right places; they are direct; they are not overloaded with qualifications; their clear delivery is not choked by a throng of asides and casual ejaculations. Usually Diderot writes as if he were loath to let the sentence go, and to allow the paragraph to come to an end. Here he lays down his proposition, and without rambling passes on to the next. The effort is not kept up quite to the close, for the last half dozen pages have the ordinary clumsy mannerism of their author.

What is the Paradox? That a player of the first rank must have much judgment, self-possession, and penetration, *but no sensibility*. An actor with nothing but sense and judgment is apt to be cold; but an actor with nothing but verve and sensibility is crazy. It is a certain temperament of good sense and warmth combined, that makes the sublime player.[274] Why should he differ from the poet, the painter, the orator, the musician? It is not in the fury of the first impulse that characteristic strokes occur to any of these men; it is in moments when they are tranquil and cool, and such strokes come by an unexpected inspiration.[275] It is for coolness to temper the delirium of enthusiasm. It is not the violent man who is beside himself that disposes of us; that is an advantage reserved for the man who possesses himself. The great poets, the great actors, and perhaps generally all the great imitators of nature, whatever they may be, are gifted with a fine imagination, a great judgment, a subtle tact, a sure taste, but they are creatures of the smallest sensibility. They are equally well fitted for too

many things; they are too busy in looking, in recognising, and in imitating, to be violently affected within themselves. Sensibility is hardly the quality of a great genius. He will have justice; but he will practise it without reaping all the sweetness of it. It is not his heart, but his head, that does it all. Well, then, what I insist upon, says Diderot, is that it is extreme sensibility that makes mediocre actors; it is mediocre sensibility that makes bad actors; and it is the absolute want of sensibility that prepares actors who shall be sublime.[276]

This is worked out with great clearness and decision, and some of the illustrations to which he resorts to lighten the dialogue are amusing enough. Perhaps the most interesting to us English is his account of Garrick, whose acquaintance he made towards the year 1765. He says that he saw Garrick pass his head between two folding doors, and in the space of a few seconds, his face went successively from mad joy to moderate joy, from that to tranquillity, from tranquillity to surprise, from surprise to astonishment, from astonishment to gloom, from gloom to utter dejection, from dejection to fear, from fear to horror, from horror to despair, and then reascend from this lowest degree to the point whence he had started.[277]

Of course his soul felt none of these emotions. “If you asked this famous man, who by himself was as well worth a journey to England to see, as all the wonders of Rome are worth a journey to Italy, if you asked him, I say, for the scene of *The Little Baker’s Boy*, he played it; if you asked him the next minute for the scene from *Hamlet*, he played that too for you, equally ready to sob over the fall of his pies, and to follow the path of the dagger in the air.”[278]

Apart from the central proposition, Diderot makes a number of excellent observations which show his critical faculty at its best. As, for example, in answering the question, what is the truth of the stage? Is it to show things exactly as they are in nature? By no means. The true in that sense would

only be the common. The really true is the conformity of action, speech, countenance, voice, movement, gesture, with an ideal model imagined by the poet, and often exaggerated by the player. And the marvel is that this model influences not only the tone, but the whole carriage and gait. Again, what is the aim of multiplied rehearsals? To establish a balance among the different talents of the actors. The supreme excellence of one actor does not recompense you for the mediocrity of the others, which is brought by that very superiority into disagreeable prominence. Again, accent is easier to imitate than movement, but movements are what strike us most violently. Hence a law to which there is no exception, namely, under pain of being cold, to make your denouement an action and not a narrative.[279]

One of the strongest satires on the reigning dramatic style, Diderot found in the need that the actor had of the mirror. The fewer gestures, he said, the better; frequent gesticulation impairs energy and destroys nobleness. It is the countenance, the eyes, it is the whole body that ought to move, and not the arms.[280] There is no maxim more forgotten by poets than that which says that great passions are mute. It depends on the player to produce a greater effect by silence than the poet can produce by all his fine speeches.[281] Above all, the player is to study tranquil scenes, for it is these that are the most truly difficult. He commends a young actress to play every morning, by way of orisons, the scene of Athalie with Joas; to say for evensong some scenes of Agrippina with Nero; and for Benedicite the first scene of Phædra with her confidante. Especially there is to be little emphasis — a warning grievously needed by ninety-nine English speakers out of a hundred — for emphasis is hardly ever natural; it is only a forced imitation of nature.[282]

Diderot had perceived very early that the complacency with which his countrymen regarded the national theatre was extravagant. He would not allow a comparison between the conventional classic of the French stage and the works of the Greek stage. He insisted in the case of the Greeks that

their subjects are noble, well chosen, and interesting; that the action seems to develop itself spontaneously; that their dialogue is simple and very close to what is natural; that the dénouements are not forced; that the interest is not divided nor the action overloaded with episodes. In the French classic he found none of these merits. He found none of that truth which is the only secret of pleasing and touching us; none of that simple and natural movement which is the only path to perfect and unbroken illusion. The dialogue is all emphasis, wit, glitter; all a thousand leagues away from nature. Instead of artificially giving to their characters *esprit* at every point, poets ought to place them in such situations as will give it to them. Where in the world did men and women ever speak as we declaim? Why should princes and kings walk differently from any man who walks well? Did they then gesticulate like raving madmen? Do princesses when they speak utter sharp hissings?

People believe us to have brought tragedy to a high degree of perfection. It is not so. Of all kinds of literature it is the most imperfect.[283]

The ideas which appeared thus incongruously in the tales of 1748 reappeared in the direct essays on the drama in 1757 and 1758. We have left nothing undone, he said, to corrupt dramatic style. We have preserved from the ancients that emphasis of versification which was so well fitted to languages of strong quantity and marked accent, to vast theatres, to a declamation that had an instrumental accompaniment; and then we have given up simplicity of plot and dialogue, and all truth of situation.[284] La Motte nearly fifty years before had attacked the pseudo-classic drama. He had inveighed against the unities, against long monologues, against the device of confidants, and against verse. His assault, in which he had the powerful aid of Fontenelle, was part of that battle between Moderns and Ancients with which the literary activity of the century had opened. The brilliant success of the tragedies of Voltaire had restored the lustre of the

conventional drama, though Voltaire infused an element of the romantic under the severity of the old forms. But the drama had become even less like Sophocles and Euripides in *Zaïre* than in *Phédre* or *Iphigénie*. Voltaire intended to constitute the French drama into an independent form. He expected to be told that he was not like Sophocles, and he did not abstain from some singularly free railing against Euripides. The Greek pieces often smacked too much of the tone of the fair to satisfy him; they were too familiar and colloquial for a taste that had been made fastidious by the court-pieces of Lewis XIV. Diderot was kept free from such deplorable criticism as this by feeling that the Greek drama was true to the sentiment of the age that gave it birth, and that the French drama, if not in the hands of Racine, still even in the hands of Voltaire, and much more in the hands of such men as Lagrange-Chancel and the elder Crébillon, was true to no sentiment save one purely literary, artificial, and barren. He insists on the hopelessness of the stage, unless men prepared themselves at every part for a grand return to nature. We have seen what is his counsel to the actor. He preaches in the same key to the scene-painter and the maker of costumes. Scene-painting ought to be more rigorously true than any other kind of picture. Let there be no distraction, no extraneous suggestion, to interfere with the impression intended by the poet. Have you a salon to represent? Let it be that of a man of taste and no more: no ostentation and no gilding, unless the situation expressly demands the contrary.

In the dresses the same rule holds good. Under robes that are overladen with gold lace, I only see a rich man; what I want to see is a man. Pretty and simple draperies of severe tints are what we need, not a mass of tinsel and embroidery. “A courageous actress has just got rid of her panier, and nobody has found her any the worse for it. Ah, if she only dared one day to show herself on the stage with all the nobility and simplicity of adjustment that her characters demand; nay, in the disorder into which she would be

thrown by an event so terrible as the death of a husband, the loss of a son, and the other catastrophes of the tragic stage, what would become, round her dishevelled figure, of all those powdered, curled, frizzled, tricked-out creatures? Sooner or later they must put themselves in unison. O nature, nature! We can never resist her."[285]

From all this we turn, for a few moments only, and not too cheerfully, to the Serbonian bog of dramatic rules and the metaphysics of the theatre. There is no subject in literature, not even the interpretation of the Apocalypse, which has given birth to such pedantic, dismal, and futile discussion. The immense controversy, carried on in books, pamphlets, sheets and flying articles, mostly German, as to what it was that Aristotle really meant by the famous words in the sixth chapter of the *Poetics*, about tragedy accomplishing the purification of our moods of pity and sympathetic fear, is one of the disgraces of human intelligence, a grotesque monument of sterility. The great tap-root of fallacy has been and remains the incessant imputation of ethical or social purpose to the dramatist, and the demand of direct and combined ethical or social effect from the drama. There is no critic, from the great Aristotle downwards, who has steered quite clear of these evil shallows; Diderot, as we have seen, least of all. But Diderot disarms the impatience which narrower critics kindle, by this magnificent concession, coming at the close of all: "Especially remember that *there is no general principle;* I do not know a single one of those that I have indicated which a man of genius cannot infringe with success."[286] Here we listen to the voice of the genuine Diderot; and if this be granted, we need not give more than a passing attention to the rules that have gone before — about the danger of borrowing in the same composition the shades both of the comic and of the tragic styles; about movement being injurious to dignity, and of the importance therefore of not making the principal personage the *machinist* of the piece; about the inexpediency of episodic

personages — and so forth. The only remark worth making on these propositions is that, whatever their value may be, Diderot at any rate, like a true philosopher, generalised from the facts of nature and art. He did not follow the too common critical method of reading one's own ideas into a work of art, and then taking them back again in the more imposing form of inevitable deductions from the work itself.

What Diderot conceived himself really to have done, was to have sketched and constituted a new species in the great dramatic kingdom. Every one knows, he said, that there is tragedy and that there is comedy, but we have to learn that there is room in nature and the art of the stage for a third division, namely, the *genre sérieux*, a kind of comedy that has for its object virtue and the duties of man. Why should the writer of comedy confine his work to what is vicious or ridiculous in men? Why should not the duties of men furnish the dramatist with as ample material as their vices? Surely in the *genre honnête et sérieux* the subject is as important as in gay comedy. The characters are as varied and as original. The passions are all the more energetic as the interest will be greater. The style will be graver, loftier, more forcible, more susceptible of what we call sentiment, a quality without which no style ever yet spoke to the heart. The ridiculous will not be absent, for the madness of actions and speeches, when they are suggested by the misunderstanding of interests or by the transport of passion, is the truly ridiculous thing in men and in life.[287]

Besides his own two pieces, Diderot would probably have pointed to Terence as the author coming nearest to the *genre sérieux*. If Goethe's bad play of *Stella* had retained the close as he originally wrote it, with the bigamous Fernando in the last scene rejoicing over the devoted agreement of the two ladies and his daughter to live with him in happy unity, that would perhaps have been a comedy of the *genre sérieux*, with the duties of man gracefully adapted to circumstances.

The theory of the *genre sérieux* has not led to the formation of any school of writers adopting it and working it out, or to the production of any masterpiece that has held its ground, as has happened in tragedy, comedy, and farce. Beaumarchais, who at last achieved such a dazzling and portentous success by one dramatic masterpiece, began his career as a playwright by following the vein of *The Father of the Family;* but *The Marriage of Figaro*, though not without strong traces of Diderotian sentiment in pungent application, yet is in its structure and composition less French than Spanish. It is quite true, as Rosenkranz says, that the prevailing taste on the French stage in our own times favours above all else bourgeois romantic comedy, written in prose.[288] But the strength of the romantic element in them would have been as little satisfactory to Diderot's love of realistic moralising as the conventional tragedy of the court of Lewis XIV. The Fable of most of them turns on adultery, and this is not within the method of the *genre sérieux* as expounded by Diderot. Perhaps half a dozen comedies, such, for instance, as *The Ideas of Madame Aubray,* by M. Dumas, are of the *genre sérieux*, but certainly there are not enough of such comedies to constitute a genuine Diderotian school in France. There is no need therefore to say more about the theory than this, namely, that though the drama is an imitative art, yet besides imitation its effects demand illusion. What, cries Diderot, you do not conceive the effect that would be produced on you by a real scene, with real dresses, with speech in true proportion to the action, with the actions themselves simple, with the very dangers that have made you tremble for your parents, for your friends, for yourselves? No, we answer: reproduction of reality does not move us as a powerful work of imagination moves us. "We may as well urge," said Burke, "that stones, sand, clay, and metals lie in a certain manner in the earth, as a reason for building with these materials and in that manner, as for writing according to the accidental disposition of characters in

Nature."[289] Common dangers do not excite us; it is the presentation of danger in some uncommon form, in some new combination, in some fresh play of motive and passion, that quickens that sympathetic fear and pity which it is the end of a play to produce. And if this be so, there is another thing to be said. If we are to be deliberately steeped in the atmosphere of Duty, illusion is out of place. The constant presence of that severe and overpowering figure, "Stern Daughter of the Voice of God," checks the native wildness of imagination, restricts the exuberance of fancy, and sets a rigorous limit to invention. Diderot used to admit that the *genre sérieux* could never take its right place until it had been handled by a man of high dramatic genius. The cause why this condition has never come to pass is simply that its whole structure and its regulations repel the faculties of dramatic genius.

Besides the perfection of the *genre sérieux*, Diderot insisted that the following tasks were also to be achieved before the stage could be said to have attained the full glory of the other arts. First, a domestic or bourgeois tragedy must be created. Second, the conditions of men, their callings and situations, the types of classes, in short, must be substituted for mere individual characters. Third, a real tragedy must be introduced upon the lyric theatre. Finally, the dance must be brought within the forms of a true poem.

The only remark to be made upon this scheme touches the second article of it. To urge the substitution of types of classes for individual character was the very surest means that could have been devised for bringing back the conventional forms of the pseudo-classic drama. The very mark of that drama was that it introduced types instead of vigorously stamped personalities. What would be gained by driving the typical king off the stage, only to make room for the generalisation of a shopkeeper? This was not the path that led to romanticism, to André Chenier, to De Vigny, to

Lamartine, to Victor Hugo. Théophile Gautier has told us that the fiery chiefs of the romantic school who suddenly conquered France at the close of the Restoration, divided the whole world into *flamboyant* and *drab*. In the literature of the past they counted Voltaire one of the Drab, and Diderot a Flamboyant.[290] If it be not too presumptuous in a foreigner to dissent, we cannot but think that they were mistaken. Nothing could be farther removed at every part from Diderot's dramatic scheme, than *Faust* or *Götz von Berlichingen* or *Hernani*.

The truth is that it was impossible for an effective antagonism to the classic school to rise in the mind of an Encyclopædist, for the reason that the Encyclopædists hated and ignored what they called the Dark Ages. Yet it was exactly the Dark Ages from which the great romantic revival drew its very life-breath. "In the eighteenth century," it has been said, "it was really the reminiscence of the classic spirit which was awakened in the newer life of Europe, and made prominent."[291] This is true in a certain historic sense of Rousseau's politics, and perhaps of Voltaire's rationalism. In spite of the vein of mysticism which occasionally shows in him, it is true in some degree of Diderot himself, if by classicism we mean the tendency to make man the centre of the universe. Classicism treats man as worthy and great, living his life among cold and neutral forces. This is the very opposite of the sinfulness, imperfection, and nothingness habitually imputed to man, and the hourly presence of a whole hierarchy of busy supernatural agents placed about man by the Middle Ages. Yet we cannot but see that Diderot was feeling for dramatic forms and subjects that would have been as little classic as romantic. He failed in the search. There is one play and only one of his epoch that is not classic, and is not romantic, but speaks independently the truest and best mind of the eighteenth century itself, in its own form and language. That play is *Nathan the Wise*.

CHAPTER VIII. RAMEAU'S NEPHEW.



IN HYPOCHONDRIACAL MOMENTS, it has been said, the world, viewed from the æsthetic side, appears to many a one a cabinet of caricatures; from the intellectual side, a madhouse; and from the moral side, a harbouring place for rascals.[292] We might perhaps extend this saying beyond the accidents of hypochondriasis, and urge that the few wide, profound, and real observers of human life have all known, and known often, this fantastic consciousness of living in a strange distorted universe of lunatics, knaves, grotesques. It is an inevitable mood to any who dare to shake the kaleidoscopic fragments out of their conventional and accepted combination. Who does not remember deep traces of such a mood in Plato, Shakespeare, Pascal, Goethe? And Diderot, who went near to having something of the deep quality of those sovereign spirits, did not escape, any more than they, the visitation of the misanthropic spectre. The distinction of the greater minds is that they have no temptation to give the spectre a permanent home with them, as is done by theologians in order to prove the necessity of grace and another world, or by cynics in order to prove the wisdom of selfishness in this world. The greater minds accept the worse facts of character for what they are worth, and bring them into a right perspective with the better facts. They have no expectation of escaping all perplexities, nor of hitting on answers to all the moral riddles of the world. Yet are they ever drawn by an invincible fascination to the feet of the mighty Sphinx of society. She bewilders them with questions that are never overheard by common ears, and torments them with a mockery that is unobserved by common eyes. The energetic — a Socrates, a Diderot — cannot content themselves with merely recording her everlasting puzzles; still less with merely writing over again the already recorded answers. They

insist on scrutinising the moral world afresh; they resolve the magniloquent vocabulary of abstract ethics into the small realities from which it has come; they break the complacent repose of opinion and usage by a graphic irony. "The definitions of moral beings," said Diderot, "are always made from what such beings ought to be, and never from what they are. People incessantly confound duty with the thing as it is."[293] We shall proceed to give a short account of one or two dialogues in which he endeavours to keep clear of this confusion.

By far the most important of these is *Rameau's Nephew*. The fortunes of this singular production are probably unique in literary history. In the year 1804

Schiller handed to Goethe the manuscript of a piece by Diderot, with the wish that he might find himself able to translate it into German. "As I had long," says Goethe, "cherished a great regard for this author, I cheerfully undertook the task, after looking through the original. People can see, I hope, that I threw my whole soul into it."[294] When he had done his work, he returned the manuscript to Schiller. Schiller died almost immediately (May 1805), and the mysterious manuscript disappeared. Goethe could never learn either whence it had come, or whither it went. He always suspected that the autograph original had been sent to the Empress Catherine at St. Petersburg, and that Schiller's manuscript was a copy from that. Though Goethe had executed his translation, as he says, "not merely with readiness but even with passion," the violent and only too just hatred then prevailing in Germany for France and for all that belonged to France, hindered any vogue which *Rameau's Nephew* might otherwise have had. On the eve of Austerlitz and of Jena there might well be little humour for a satire from the French.

Thirteen years afterwards an edition of Diderot's works appeared in Paris (Belin's edition of 1818), but the editors were obliged to content

themselves, for *Rameau's Nephew*, with an analysis of Goethe's translation. In 1821 a lively sensation was produced by the publication of what professed to be the original text of the missing dialogue. It was really a retranslation into French from Goethe. The fraud was not discovered for some time, until in 1823 Brière announced for his edition of Diderot's works a reprint from a genuine original. This original he had procured from Madame de Vandeul, Diderot's daughter, who still survived. She described it as a copy made in 1760 under the author's own eyes, and this may have been the case, though, if so, it must, from some of the references, have been revised after 1773. The two young men who had tried to palm off their retranslation from Goethe as Diderot's own text, at once had the effrontery to accuse Brière and Diderot's daughter of repeating their own fraud. A vivacious dispute followed between the indignant publisher and his impudent detractors. At length Brière appealed to the great Jove of Weimar. Goethe expressed his conviction that Brière's text was the genuine text of the original, and this was held to settle the question. Yet Goethe's voucher for its correspondence with the copy handed to him by Schiller was not really decisive evidence. He admits that he executed the translation very rapidly, and had no time to compare it closely with the French. An identification nearly twenty years afterwards of verbal resemblances and minute references, in a work that had been only a short time in his hands, cannot be counted testimony of the highest kind. We have thus the extraordinary circumstance that for a great number of years, down almost to the present decade, the text of the one masterpiece of a famous man who died so recently as 1784 rested on a single manuscript, and that a manuscript of disputed authenticity.[295]

Critics differ extremely in their answers to the question of the subject or object of Diderot's singular "farce-tragedy." One declares it to be merely a satirical picture of contemporary manners. Another insists that it is meant to

be an ironical *reductio ad absurdum* of the theory of self-interest, by exhibiting a concrete example of its working in all its grossness. A third holds that it was composed by way of rejoinder to Palissot's comedy *(Les Philosophes*), 1760, which had brought the chiefs of the rationalistic school upon the stage, and presented them as enemies of the human race. A fourth suspects that the personal and dramatic portions are no more than a setting for the discussion of the comparative merits of the French and Italian schools of music. The true answer is that the dialogue is all of these things, because it is none of them. It is neither more nor less than the living picture and account of an original, drawn by a man of genius who was accustomed to observe human nature and society with a free unblinking vision, and to meditate upon them deeply and searchingly.

Diderot goes to work with Rameau in some sort and to a certain extent as Shakespeare went to work with Falstaff. He is the artist, reproducing with the variety and perfection of art a whimsical figure that struck his fancy and stirred the creative impulse. Ethics, æsthetics, manners, satire, are all indeed to be found in the dialogue, but they are only there as incident to the central figure of the sketch, the prodigy of parasites. Diderot had no special fondness for these originals. Yet he had a keen and just sense of their interest. "Their character stands out from the rest of the world, it breaks that tiresome uniformity which our bringing up, our social conventions, and our arbitrary fashions have introduced. If one of them makes his appearance in a company, he is like leaven, fermenting and restoring to each person present a portion of his natural individuality. He stirs people up, moves them, provokes to praise or blame: he is a means of bringing out reality; gives honest people a chance of showing what they are made of, and unmasks the rogues."[296]

Hearing that the subject of Diderot's dialogue is the Parasite, the scholar will naturally think of that savage satire in which Juvenal rehearses the

thousand humiliations that Virro inflicts on Trebius: how the wretched follower has to drink fiery stuff from broken crockery, while the patron quaffs of the costliest from splendid cups of amber and precious stones; how the host has fine oil of Venafrum, while the guest munches cabbage that has been steeped in rancid lamp-oil; one plays daintily with mullet and lamprey, while the other has his stomach turned by an eel as long as a snake, and bloated in the foul torrent of the sewers; Virro has apples that might have come from the gardens of the Hesperides, while Trebius gnaws such musty things as are tossed to a performing monkey on the town wall. But the distance is immeasurable between Juvenal's scorching truculence and Diderot's half-ironical, half-serious sufferance. Juvenal knows that Trebius is a base and abject being; he tells him what he is; and in the process blasts him. Diderot knows that Rameau too is base and abject, but he is so little willing to rest in the fat and easy paradise of conventions, that he seems to be all the time vaguely wondering in his own mind how far this genius of grossness and paradox and bestial sophism is a pattern of the many, with the mask thrown off. He seems to be inwardly musing whether it can after all be true, that if one draws aside a fold of the gracious outer robe of conformity, there is no comeliness of life shining underneath, but only this horror of the skeleton and the worm. He restrains exasperation at the brilliant effrontery of his man, precisely as an anatomist would suppress disgust at a pathological monstrosity, or an astonishing variation in which he hoped to surprise some vital secret. Rameau is not crudely analysed as a vile type: he is searched as exemplifying on a prodigious scale elements of character that lie furtively in the depths of characters that are not vile. It seems as if Diderot unconsciously anticipated that terrible, that woful, that desolating saying, — *There is in every man and woman something which, if you knew it, would make you hate them*. Rameau is not all parasite. He is your brother and mine, a product from the same rudimentary factors of

mental composition, a figure cast equally with ourselves in one of the countless moulds of the huge social foundry.

Such is the scientific attitude of mind towards character: It is not philanthropic nor pitiful: the fact that base characters exist and are of intelligible origin is no reason why we should not do our best to shun and to extirpate them. This assumption of the scientific point of view, this change from mere praise and blame to scrutiny, this comprehension that mere execration is not the last word, is a mark of the modern spirit. Besides Juvenal, another writer of genius has shown us the parasite of an ancient society. Lucian, whose fertility, wit, invention, mockery, freshness of spirit, and honest hatred of false gods, make him the Voltaire of the second century, has painted with all his native liveliness more than one picture of the parasite. The great man's creature at Rome endures exactly the same long train of affronts and humiliations as the great man's creature at Paris sixteen centuries later, beginning with the anguish of the mortified stomach, as savoury morsels of venison or boar are given to more important guests, and ending with the anguish of the mortified spirit, as he sees himself supplanted by a rival of shapelier person, a more ingenious versifier, a cleverer mountebank. The dialogue in which Lucian ironically proves that Parasitic, or the honourable craft of Spunging, has as many of the marks of a genuine art as Rhetoric, Gymnastic, or Music, is a spirited parody of Socratic catechising and Platonic mannerisms. Simo shows to Tychiades, as ingeniously as Rameau shows to Diderot, that the Spunger has a far better life of it, and is a far more rational and consistent person than the orator and the philosopher.[297] Lucian's satire is vivid, brilliant, and diverting. Yet every one feels that Diderot's performance, while equally vivid, is marked by greater depth of spirit; comes from a soil that has been more freely broken up, and has been enriched by a more copious experience. The ancient turned upon these masterpieces of depravation the flash of intellectual scorn; the

modern eyes them with a certain moral patience, and something of that curious kind of interest, looking half like sympathy, which a hunter has for the object of his chase.

The Rameau of the dialogue was a real personage, and there is a dispute whether Diderot has not calumniated him. Evidence enough remains that he was at least a person of singular character and irregular disastrous life. Diderot's general veracity of temperament would make us believe that his picture is authentic, but the interest of the dialogue is exactly the same in either case. Juvenal's fifth satire would be worth neither more nor less, however much were found out about Trebius.

"Rameau is one of the most eccentric figures in the country, where God has not made them lacking. He is a mixture of elevation and lowness, of good sense and madness; the notions of good and bad must be mixed up together in strange confusion in his head, for he shows the good qualities that nature has bestowed on him without any ostentation, and the bad ones without the smallest shame. For the rest, he is endowed with a vigorous frame, a particular warmth of imagination, and an uncommon strength of lungs. If you ever meet him, unless you happen to be arrested by his originality, you will either stuff your fingers into your ears or else take to your heels. Heavens, what a monstrous pipe! Nothing is so little like him as himself. One time he is lean and wan, like a patient in the last stage of consumption: you could count his teeth through his cheeks; you would say he must have passed some days without tasting a morsel, or that he is fresh from La Trappe. A month after, he is stout and sleek as if he had been sitting all the time at the board of a financier, or had been shut up in a Bernardine monastery. To-day in dirty linen, his clothes torn and patched, with barely a shoe to his foot, he steals along with a bent head; one is tempted to hail him and toss him a shilling. To-morrow, all powdered, curled, in a good coat, he marches about with head erect and open mien,

and you would almost take him for a decent worthy creature. He lives from day to day, from hand to mouth, downcast or sad, just as things may go. His first care of a morning when he gets up is to know where he will dine; after dinner, he begins to think where he may pick up a supper. Night brings disquiets of its own. Either he climbs to a shabby garret he has, unless the landlady, weary of waiting for her rent, has taken the key away from him; or else he shrinks to some tavern on the outskirts of the town, where he waits for daybreak over a crust of bread and a mug of beer. When he has not threepence in his pocket, as sometimes happens, he has recourse either to a hackney-carriage belonging to a friend, or to a coachman of some man of quality, who gives him a bed on the straw beside the horses. In the morning he still has bits of the mattress in his hair. If the weather is mild, he measures the Champs Elysées all night long. With the day he reappears in the town, dressed over night for the morrow, and from the morrow sometimes dressed for the rest of the week."

Diderot is accosted by this curious being one afternoon on a bench in front of the Café de la Régence in the Palais Royal. They proceed in the thoroughly natural and easy manner of interlocutors in a Platonic dialogue. It is not too much to say that *Rameau's Nephew* is the most effective and masterly use of that form of discussion since Plato. Diderot's vein of realism is doubtless in strong contrast with Plato's poetic and idealising touch. Yet imaginative strokes are not wanting to soften the repulsive theme, and to bring the sordid and the foul within the sphere of art. For an example. "Time has passed," says Rameau, "and that is always so much gained."

"*I.* — So much lost, you mean.

"*He.* — No, no; gained. People grow rich every moment; a day less to live, or a crown piece to the good, 'tis all one. When the last moment comes, one is as rich as another. Samuel Bernard, who by pillaging and

stealing and playing bankrupt, leaves seven-and-twenty million francs in gold, is no better than Rameau, who leaves not a penny, and will be indebted to charity for a shroud to wrap about him. The dead man hears not the tolling of the bell; 'tis in vain that a hundred priests bawl dirges for him, in vain that a long file of blazing torches go before. His soul walks not by the side of the master of the funeral ceremonies. To moulder under marble, or to moulder under clay, 'tis still to moulder. To have around one's bier children in red and children in blue, or to have not a creature, what matters it?"

These are the gleams of the *mens divinior*, that relieve the perplexing moral squalor of the portrait. Even here we have the painful innuendo that a thought which is solemnising and holy to the noble, serves equally well to point a trait of cynical defiance in the ignoble.

Again, there is an indirectly imaginative element in the sort of terror which the thoroughness of the presentation inspires. For indeed it is an emotion hardly short of terror that seizes us, as we listen to the stringent unflinching paradox of this heterogeneous figure. Rameau is the squalid and tattered Satan of the eighteenth century. He is a Mephistopheles out at elbows, a Lucifer in low water; yet always diabolic, with the bright flash of the pit in his eye. Disgust is transformed into horror and affright by the trenchant confidence of his spirit, the daring thoroughness and consistency of his dialectic, the lurid sarcasm, the vile penetration. He discusses a horrible action, or execrable crime, as a virtuoso examines a statue or a painting. He has that rarest fortitude of the vicious, not to shrink from calling his character and conduct by their names. He is one of Swift's Yahoos, with the courage of its opinions. He seems to give one reason for hating and dreading oneself. The effect is of mixed fear and fascination, as of a magician whose miraculous crystal is to show us what and how we shall be twenty years from now; or as when a surgeon tells the tale of some

ghastly disorder, that may at the very moment be stealthily preparing for us a doom of anguish.

Hence our dialogue is assuredly no "meat for little people nor for fools." Some of it is revolting in its brutal indecency. Even Goethe's self-possession cannot make it endurable to him. But it is a study to be omitted by no one who judges the corruption of the old society in France an important historic subject. The picture is very like the corruption of the old society in Rome. We see the rotten material which the purifying flame of Jacobinism was soon to consume out of the land with fiery swiftness. We watch the very classes from which, as we have been so often told, the regeneration of France would have come, if only demagogues and rabble had not violently interposed. There is no gaiety in the style; none of that laughter which makes such a delineation of the manners of the time as we find in Collé's play of *Truth in Wine*, *naïf*, true to nature, and almost exhilarating. In *Rameau* we are afflicted by the odour of deadly taint.

As the dialogue is not in every hand — nor could any one wish that it should be — I have thought it worth while to print an English rendering of a considerable part of it in an appendix. Mr. Carlyle told us long ago that it must be translated into English, and although such a piece of work is less simple than it may seem, it appears right to give the reader an opportunity of judging for himself of the flavour of the most characteristic of all Diderot's performances. Only let no reader turn to it who has any invincible repugnance to that curious turn for *wildbret*, which Goethe has described as the secret of some arts.

Dixeris hæc inter varicosos centuriones, Continuo crassum ridet Pulfenius ingens Et centum Græcos curto centusse licebit.

As I have already said, it must be judged as something more than a literary diversion. "You do not suspect, Sir Philosopher," says Rameau, "that at this moment I represent the most important part of the town and the

court." As the painter of the picture says, Rameau confessed the vices that he had, and that most of the people about us have; but he was no hypocrite. He was neither more nor less abominable than they; he was only more frank and systematic and profound in his depravity. This is the social significance of the dialogue. This is what, apart from other considerations, makes *Rameau's Nephew* so much more valuable a guide to the moral sentiment of the time than merely licentious compositions like those of Louvet or La Olos. Its instructiveness is immense to those who examine the conditions that prepared the Revolution. Rameau is not the ακόλστος of Aristotle, nor the creature of απονοία described by Theophrastus — the castaway by individual idiosyncrasy, the reprobate by accident. The men whom he represented, the courtiers, the financiers, the merchants, the shopkeepers, were immoral by formula and depraved on principle. Vice was a doctrine to them, and wretchlessness of unclean living was reduced to a system of philosophy. Any one, I venture to repeat, who realises the extent to which this had corroded the ruling powers in France, will perceive that the furious flood of social energy which the Jacobins poured over the country was not less indispensable to France than the flood of the barbarians was indispensable for the transformation of the Roman Empire.

Scattered among the more serious fragments of the dialogue is some excellent by-play of sarcasm upon Palissot, and one or two of the other assailants of the new liberal school. Palissot is an old story. The Palissots are an eternal species. The family never dies out, and it thrives in every climate. All societies know the literary dangler in great houses, and the purveyor to fashionable prejudices. Not that he is always servile. The reader, I daresay, remembers that La Bruyère described a curious being in Troilus, the despotic parasite. Palissot, eighteenth century or nineteenth century, is often like Troilus, parasite and tyrant at the same time. He usually happens to have begun life with laudable aspirations and sincere

interests of his own; and when, alas, the mediocrity of his gifts proves too weak to bear the burden of his ambitions, the recollection of a generous youth only serves to sour old age.

Bel esprit abhorré de tous les bons esprits, Il pense par la haine échapper au mépris. A force d'attentats il se croit illustré; Et s'il n'était méchant, il serait ignoré.

Palissot began with a tragedy. He proceeded to an angry pamphlet against the Encyclopædists and the fury for innovation. Then he achieved immense vogue among fine ladies, bishops, and the lighter heads of the town, by the comedy in which he held Diderot, D'Alembert, and the others, up to hatred and ridicule. Finally, after coming to look upon himself as a serious personage, he disappeared into the mire of half-oblivious contempt and disgust that happily awaits all the poor Palissots and all their works. His name only survives in connection with the men whom he maligned. He lived to be old, as, oddly enough, Spite so often does. In the Terror he had a narrow escape, for he was brought before Chaumette. Chaumette apostrophised the assailant of Rousseau and Diderot with rude energy, but did not send him to the guillotine. In this the practical disciple only imitated the magnanimity of his theoretical masters. Rousseau had declined an opportunity of punishing Palissot's impertinences, and Diderot took no worse vengeance upon him than by making an occasional reference of contempt to him in a dialogue which he perhaps never intended to publish.

Another subject is handled in *Rameau's Nephew,* which is interesting in connection with the mental activity of Paris in the eighteenth century. Music was the field of as much passionate controversy as theology and philosophy. The Bull Unigenitus itself did not lead to livelier disputes, or more violent cabals, than the conflict between the partisans of French music and the partisans of Italian music. The horror of a Jansenist for a Molinist did not surpass that of a Lullist for a Dunist, or afterwards of a Gluckist for a

Piccinist.[298] Lulli and Rameau (the uncle of our parasite) had undisputed possession of Paris until the arrival, in 1752, of a company of Italian singers. The great quarrel at once broke out as to the true method and destination of musical composition. Is music an independent art, appealing directly to a special sense, or is it to be made an instrument for expressing affections of the mind in a certain deeper way? The Italians asked only for delicious harmonies and exquisite melodies. The French insisted that these should be subordinate to the work of the poet. The former were content with delight, the latter pressed for significance. The one declared that Italian music was no better than a silly tickling of the ears; the other that the overture to a French opera was like a prelude to a Miserere in plain-song. In 1772-73 the illustrious Gluck came to Paris. His art was believed to reconcile the two schools, to have more melody than the old French style, and more severity and meaning than the purely Italian style. French dignity was saved. But soon the old battle, which had been going on for twenty years, began to rage with greater violence than ever. Piccini was brought to Paris by the Neapolitan ambassador. The old cries were heard in a shriller key than before. Pamphlets, broadsheets, sarcasms flew over Paris from every side.

Was music only to flatter the ear, or was it to paint the passions in all their energy, to harrow the soul, to raise men's courage, to form citizens and heroes? The coffee-houses were thrown into dire confusion, and literary societies were rent by fatal discord. Even dinner-parties breathed only constraint and mistrust, and the intimacies of a lifetime came to cruel end. *Rameau's Nephew* was composed in the midst of the first part of this long campaign of a quarter of a century, and its seems to have been revised by its author in the midst of the second great episode. Diderot declares against the school of Rameau and Lulli. That he should do so was a part of his general reaction in favour of what he called the natural, against the artifice and

affectation. Goethe has pointed out the inconsistency between Diderot's sympathy for the less expressive kind of music, and his usual vehement passion for the expressive in art. He truly observes that Diderot's sympathy went in this way, because the novelty and agitation seemed likely to break up the old, stiff, and abhorred fashion, and to clear the ground afresh for other efforts.[299]

ENDNOTES.

[1] *Œuv.*, xviii. 505.

[2] *Œuv.*, xviii. 364.

[3] *Ib.* 379.

[4] *Œuv.*, i. 30.

[5] *Wahlverwandschaften*, pt. ii. ch. vii. The reader will do well to consult the philosophical estimate of the function of the man of letters given by Comte, *Philosophie Positive*, v. 512, vi. 192, 287. The best contemporary account of the principles and policy of the men of letters in the eighteenth century is to be found in Condorcet's *Esquisse d'un Tableau, etc.*, pp. 187-189 (ed. 1847).

[6] Naigeon, p. 24.

[7] *Œuv.*, xix. 162.

[8] *Œuv.*, xix. 89.

[9] *Œuv.*, xix. 93.

[10] *Œuv.*, i. xlviii.

[11] Marmontel, *Mém.*, vol. ii. b. vii. p. 315.

[12] Morellet, *Mém.*, i. p. 29.

[13] *Œuv.*, i. xlviii.

[14] *Ib.* xix. 55.

[15] *Œuv.*, xviii. 376.

[16] Madame de Vandeul says 1744. But M. Jal (*Dict. Crit.*, 495) reproduces the certificate of the marriage. Perhaps we may charitably hope that Diderot himself is equally mistaken, when in later years he sets down a disreputable adventure to 1744. (*Œuv.*, xix. 85.)

[17] For an account of Madame de Puisieux in her later years, see Mdme. Roland's *Memoirs*, i. 156.

[18] Sainte Beuve, *Causeries*, ix. 136.

[19] *Œuv.*, xix. 159. See also *Salons*, 1767, No, 118.

[20] *Les Règnes de Claud et de Néron*, § 79.

[21] Account of Diderot by Meister, printed in Grimm's *Correspondence Littéraire* xiii. 202-211.

[22] Grétry, quoted in Genin's *Œuv. choisies de Diderot*, 42.

[23] Marmontel, *Mém*., bk. vii. vol. ii. 312.

[24] Plato, *Theages*, 130, c.

[25] Art. *Encyclopédie*.

[26] See Barbier's Journal, iv. 166.

[27] The book was among those found in the possession of the unfortunate La Barre.

[28] Honegger's *Kritische Geschichte der französischen Cultureinflüsse in den letzten Jahrhunderten*, pp. 267-273.

[29] "Es ist nicht gleichgültig ob eine Folge grosser Gedanken in frischer Ursprünglichkeit auf die Zeitgenossen wirkt, oder ob sie zu einer Mixtur mit reichlichem Zusatz überlieferter Vorurtheile verarbeitet ist. Ebensowenig ist est gleichgültig welcher Stimmung, welchem Zustande der Geister eine neue Lehre begegnet. Man darf aber kühn behaupten, das für die volle durchführung der von Newton angebahnten Weltanschauung weder eine günstigere Naturanlage, noch eine günstigere Stimmung getroffen werden konnte, als die der Franzosen im 18. Jahrhundert." (Lange's *Gesch. d. Materialismus*, i. 303.) But the writer, like most historians of opinion, does not dwell sufficiently on the co-operation of external social conditions with the progress of logical inference.

[30] See Montgeron's *La Verité des Miracles de M. de Pâris démontrée* (1737) — an interesting contribution to the pathology of the human mind.

[31] Barbier, 168, 244, etc.

[32] *Pensées Philosophiques*, xviii.

[33] On this, see Lange, i. 294.

[34] *Pensées Philosophiques. Œuv.*, i. 128, 129.

[35] *Œuv.*, xix. 87. Grimm, Supp. 148.

[36] Volney, in a book that was famous in its day, *Les Ruines, ou Méditation sur les révolutions des empires* (1791), resorted to a slight difference of method. Instead of leaving the pretensions of the various creeds to cancel one another, he invented a rather striking scene, in which the priests of each creed are made to listen to the professions of their rival, and then inveigh against his superstition and inconsistency. The assumption on which Diderot's argument rests is, that as so many different creeds all make the same exclusive claim, the claim is equally false throughout. Volney's argument turns more directly on the merits, and implies that all religions are equally morbid or pathological products, because they all lead to conduct condemned by their own most characteristic maxims. Volney's concrete presentation of comparative religion was highly effective for destructive purposes, though it would now be justly thought inadequate. (See *Œuv. de Volney*, i. 109, etc.)

[37] See on this, Lange, ii. 308.

[38] *De la Suffisance de la Religion Naturelle*, § 5.

[39] It is well to remember that torture was not abolished in France until the Revolution. A Catholic writer makes the following judicious remark: "We cannot study the eighteenth century without being struck by the immoral consequences that inevitably followed for the population of Paris from the frequency and the hideous details of criminal executions. In reading the journals of the time, we are amazed at the place taken in popular life by the scenes of the Grève. It was the theatre of the day. The gibbet and the wheel did their work almost periodically, and people looked on while poor wretches writhed in slow agony all day long. Sometimes the programme was varied by decapitation and even by the stake. Torture had its legends and its heroes — the everyday talk of the generation which, having begun by seeing Damiens torn by red-hot pincers, was to end by rending Foulon limb from limb." (Carné, *Monarchie française au 18ième Siècle*, p. 493.)

[40] *Lettres sur les Anglais*, xxiii.

[41] *Essai sur le Mérite*, I. ii. § 3. *Œue.,* i. 33.

[42] "Shaftesbury is one of the most important apparitions of the eighteenth century. All the greatest spirits of that time, not only in England, but also Leibnitz, Voltaire, Diderot, Lessing, Mendelssohn, Wieland, and Herder, drew the strongest nourishment from him." (Hettner, *Literaturgeschichte des 18ten Jahrhunderts: ler Theil*. 188.) See also Lange's *Gesch. des Materialismus,* i. 306, etc. An excellent account of Shaftesbury is given by Mr. Leslie Stephen, in his *Essays on Free-thinking and Plain-speaking*.

[43] *Œuv*., i. xlvi.

[44] Jobez, *France sous Louis XV*., ii. 373. There were, in 1725, 24,000 houses, 20,000 carriages, and 120,000 horses. (Martin's *Hist, de France*, xv. 116.)

[45] The records of Paris in this century contain more than one illustration of the turbulence of this odious army of lackeys. Barbier, i. 118. For the way in which their insolence was fostered, see Saint-Simon, xii. 354, etc. The number of lackeys retained seems to have been extraordinarily great in proportion to the total of annual expenditure, and this is a curious point in the manners of the time. See Voltaire, *Dict. Phil*, § v. Économie Domestique (liv. 182).

[46] Duclos, *Mém. secrets sur le Règne de Louis XV*., iii 306.

[47] *Œuv*., xix. 91.

[48] *Ib*. p. 130.

[49] *Prom, du Sceptique. Œuv*., i. 229.

[50] "If there is a God, he is infinitely incomprehensible, since, being without parts or limits, he has no relation to us: we are therefore incapable of knowing what he is, or if he is. That being so, who shall venture to undertake the solution of the question? Not we, at any rate, who have no relation to him." *Pensees*, II. iii. 1.

[51] P. 182.

[52] P. 223.

[53] Barbazan's *Fabliaux et Contes*, iii. 409 (ed. 1808). The learned Barbazan's first edition was published in 1756, and so Diderot may well have heard some of the contents of the work then in progress.

[54] Naigeon.

[55] In my *Rousseau*, p. 243 (new ed.)

[56] *Voltaire*, p. 149 (new ed., Globe 8vo).

[57] Joubert.

[58] Hettner, *Literaiurgeschichte des 18ten Jahrhunderts*, ii. 301.

[59] *Œuv.*, ii. 260, etc.

[60] *Œuv.*, ii. 258, 259. *De l'Essai sur les Femmes, par Thomas*. See Grimm's *Corr. Lit.*, vii. 451, where the book is disparaged; and viii. 1, where Diderot's view of it is given. Thomas (1732-85) belonged to the philosophical party, but not to the militant section of it. He was a serious and orderly person in his life, and enjoyed the closest friendship with Madame Necker. His enthusiasm for virtue, justice, and freedom, expressed with much magniloquence, made him an idol in the respectable circle which Madame Necker gathered round her. He has been justly, though perhaps harshly, described as a "valetudinarian Grandison." (Albert's *Lit. Française au 18ième Siècle*, p. 423.)

[61] *Elémens de la Philosophie de Newton*, Pt. II. ch. vii. Berkeley himself only refers once to Cheselden's case: *Theory of Vision vindicated*, § 71. Professor Fraser, in his important edition of Berkeley's works (i. 444), reproduces from the *Philosophical Transactions* the original account of the operation, which is unfortunately much less clear and definite than Voltaire's emphasised version would make it, though its purport is distinct enough.

[62] *Essai sur l'Origine des Connaissances humaines*, I. § 6.

[63] *Let. sur les Aveugles*, 323, 324. Condorcet attaches a higher value to Cheselden's operation. *Œuv.*, ii. 121.

[64] Dr. M'Cosh *(Exam. of J. S. Mill's Philosophy*, p. 163) quotes what seems to be the best reported case, by a Dr. Franz, of Leipsic; and Prof. Fraser, in the appendix to Berkeley (*loc. cit.*), quotes another good case by Mr. Nunnely. See also Mill's *Exam. of Hamilton*, p. 288 (3d ed.)

[65] *Confessions*, II, vii.

[66] Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Men and Animals*, c. xiii. p. 312, and also pp. 335-337. This fact, so far as it goes, seems to make against the theory of transmitted sentiments.

[67] Locke answered that the man would not distinguish the cube from the sphere, until he had identified by actual touch the source of his former tactual impression with the object making a given visual impression. Condillac, while making just objections to the terms in which Molyneux propounded the question, answered it different from Locke. Diderot expresses his own opinion thus: "I think that when the eyes of the born-blind are opened for the first time to the light, he will perceive nothing at all; that some time will be necessary for his eye to make experiments for itself; but that it will make these experiments itself, and in its own way, and without the help of touch." This is in harmony with the modern doctrine, that there is an inherited aptitude of structure (in the eye, for instance), but that experience is an essential condition to the development and perfecting of this aptitude.

[68] A very intelligent English translation of the *Letter on the Blind* was published in 1773. For some reason or other, Diderot is described on the title-page as Physician to His most Christian Majesty.

[69] *Œuv*., i. 308.

[70] Pp. 309, 310.

[71] P. 311.

[72] *Corr.*, June 1749.

[73] See *Critical Miscellanies: First Series*.

[74] Diderot to Voltaire, 1749. *Œuv*., xix. 421.

[75] Diderot to Voltaire, 1749. *Œuv*., xix. 421.

[76] P. 294.

[77] Lewes's *Hist. Philos*., ii. 342.

[78] Rosenkranz, i. 102.

[79] Tylor's *Researches into the early history of mankind*, chaps. ii. and iii.; Lubbock's *Origin of Civilization*, chap. ix.

[80] Madame Dupré de Saint Maur, who had found favour in the eyes of the Count d'Argenson. D'Argenson, younger brother of the Marquis, who had been dismissed in 1747, was in power from 1743 to 1757. Notwithstanding his alleged share in Diderot's imprisonment, he was a tolerably steady protector of the philosophical party.

[81] Barbier, iv. 337.

[82] There is a picture of Berryer, under the name of Orgon in that very curious book, *L'Ecole de l'Homme*, ii. 73.

[83] Pieces given in Diderot's Works, xx. 121-123.

[84] Naigeon, p. 131.

[85] Voltaire's *Corr*. July and Aug. 1749.

[86] *Conf*., II. viii.

[87] Michelet's *Louis XV*., p. 258.

[88] See the present author's *Rousseau*, vol. i. p. 134 (Globe 8vo ed.)

[89] For the two petitions of the booksellers to D'Argenson praying for Diderot's liberty, see M. Assézat's preliminary notice. *Œuv*., xiii. 112, etc.

[90] Jourdain's *Recherches sur les traductions latines d'Aristote*, p. 325.

[91] *Lit. of Europe*, pt. i. ch. ii. § 39.

[92] Whewell's *Hist. Induc. Sci.*. xii. c. 7.

[93] Fr. Roger Bacon; J.S. Brewer's Pref. pp 57, 63.

[94] Leibnitii, Opera v. 184.

[95] *Œuv. de D'Alembert*, i. 63.

[96] *Mém.* pour J.P.F. Luneau de Boisjermain, 4to, Paris, 1771. See also Diderot's *Prospectus*, "La traduction entière de Chambers nous a passé sous les yeux," etc.

[97] Biog. Universelle, *s.v.*

[98] Michelet, *Louis XV.*, 258. D'Aguesseau (1668-1751) has left one piece which ought to be extricated from the thirteen quartos of his works — his memoir of his father (*Œuv.*, xiii.) This is one of those records of solid and elevated character, which do more to refresh and invigorate the reader than a whole library of religious or ethical exhortations can do. It has the loftiness, the refined austerity, the touching impressiveness of Tacitus's *Agricola* or Condorcet's *Turgot*, together with a certain grave sweetness that was almost peculiar to the Jansenist school of the seventeenth century.

[99] A short estimate of D'Alembert's principal scientific pieces, by M. Bertram, is to be found in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, for October 1865.

[100] *Œuv. de D'Alembert*, iv. 367.

[101] *Œuv. de J. Ph. Roland*, i. 230 (ed. 1800).

[102] *Essai sur la Société des Gens de Lettres et des Grands*, etc. *Œuv*., iv. 372. "Write," he says, "as if you loved glory; in conduct, act as if it were indifferent to you." Compare, with reference to the passage in the text, Duclos's remark (*Consid. sur les Mœurs*, ch. xi.): "The man in power commands, but the intelligent govern, because in time they form public opinion, and that sooner or later subjugates every kind of despotism." Only partially true.

[103] *Pensées Philos.*, § 26.

[104] *Phil. Pos.*, v. 520. *Polit. Pos.*, iii. 584.

[105] See Pref. to vol. iii.

[106] For instance, see Pref. to vol. vi.

[107] *Siècle de Louis XV*., ch. xliii.

[108] Grimm, *Corr. Lit.*, i. 273. Diderot, *Œuv*., iv. 15.

[109] *Avertissement* to vol. vi.; also to vol. vii. Turgot's articles were Etymiologie, Existence, Expansibilité, Foires, Fondations. The text of these is wrongly inserted among Diderot's contributions to the Encyclopædia, in the new edition of his Works, xv. 12.

[110] Condorcet's *Vie de Turgot*.

[111] Pref. to vol. iii. (1752), and to vol. vi. (1756).

[112] Pref. to vol. ii.

[113] Grimm, *Corr. Lit.*, i. 130. Forbonnais's chief work is his *Becherches et Considérations sur les finances de la France*.

[114] *Avert.* to vol. ii.

[115] Nov. 10, 1760, xix. 24. Also, Oct. 7, 1761, xix. 35.

[116] See also Preface to vol. iii.

[117] *Avert.* to vol. vi., and *s. v. Fontange*. Grimm, i. 451.

[118] *Corresp. avec D'Alembert* (*Œuv.*, lxxv.), Sept. 1755, Feb. 1757, etc.

[119] Dec. 22, 1757.

[120] May 24, 1757.

[121] Dec. 13, 1756; April 1756.

[122] July 21, 1757.

[123] Article *Encyclopédie*.

[124] To Voltaire, Feb. 15, 1757.

[125] Hettner's *Literaturgesch, des 18ten Jahrhunderts*, ii. 277.

[126] Art. *Encyclopédie*.

[127] *Prospectus*.

[128] Barbier, v. 151, 153.

[129] Diderot to Voland, *Œuv*., xviii. 361. Carlyle's *Frederick,* bk. xviii. ch. xi.

[130] *Apologie de l' Abbe de Prades. Œuv.,* i. 482.

[131] See Jobez, i. 358.

[132] xix. 425.

[133] Barbier, v. 160.

[134] *Ib*. v. 169.

[135] Grimm, *Corr. Lit*., i. 81. Barbier, *v*. 170.

[136] *Avert.*, to vol. iii. *Œuv. de D'Alembert*, iv. 410.

[137] Barbier, v. 170. Grimm, *Corr. Lit.*, i. 201; *Ib.* ii. 197.

[138] Hardy, quoted by Aubertin, 407, 408.

[139] *Corr. Lit.*, ii. 271.

[140] To D'Alembert, Dec. 29, 1757; Jan. 1758.

[141] For a short account of Helvétius's book, see a later chapter.

[142] *Corr. Lit.*, ii. 292, 293.

[143] Barbier, vii. 125-142.

[144] Lacretelle's *France pendant le 18ième Siècle*, iii. 89.

[145] Jobez, ii. 464, 538.

[146] See *Rousseau*, vol. i. chaps, vii. and ix. (Globe 8vo ed.)

[147] *Louis XV. et Louis XVI.*, p. 50.

[148] Jan. 11, 1758. Jan. 20, 1758. Diderot to Mdlle. Voland, Oct. 11, 1759. See the following chapter.

[149] Voltaire to D'Alembert, Jan. to May 1758. Voltaire to Diderot, Jan. 1758.

[150] Diderot to Voltaire, Feb. 19, 1758, xix. 452.

[151] To Voland, *Œuv.*, xix. 146.

[152] *Corr. Lit.*, vii. 146.

[153] *Corr. Lit.*, vii. 146.

[154] *Œuv. de Voltaire*. Published sometimes among *Facéties*, sometimes among *Mélanges*.

[155] See *Œuv. Choisies de Jean Reynaud*, reprinted in 1866. The article on *Encyclopèdie* (vol. i.) is an interesting attempt to vindicate Cartesian principles of classification.

[156] See fly-leaf of vol. xxviii.

[157] *Mém.*, ii. 115. Grimm, vii. 145.

[158] De Maistre says that the reputation of Bacon does not really go farther back than the Encyclopædia, and that no true discoverer either knew him or leaned on him for support. (*Examen de la Phil. de Bacon*, ii. 110.) Diderot says: "I think I have taught my fellow-citizens to esteem and read Bacon; people have turned over the pages of this profound author more since the last five or six years than has ever been the case before" (xiv. 494). In Professor Fowler's careful and elaborate edition of the Novum Organum (*Introduct.*, p. 104), he disputes the statement of Montuola and others, that the celebrity of Bacon dates from the Encyclopædia. All turns upon what we mean by celebrity. What the Encyclopædists certainly did was to raise Bacon, for a time, to the popular throne from which Voltaire's Newtonianism had pushed Descartes. Mr. Fowler traces a chain of Baconian tradition, no doubt, but he perhaps surrenders nearly as much as is claimed when he admits that "the patronage of Voltaire and the Encyclopædists did much to extend the study of Bacon's writings, besides producing a considerable controversy as to his true meaning on many questions of philosophy and theology."

[159] See above, p. 62, *note*.

[160] D'Alembert was not afraid to contend against the great captain of the age, that the military spirit of Lewis XIV. had been a great curse to Europe. He showed a true appreciation of Frederick's character and conception of his duties as a ruler, in believing that the King of Prussia would rather have had a hundred thousand labourers more, and as many soldiers fewer, if his situation had allowed it. *Corresp. avec le roi de Prusse*, *Œuv.*, v. 305.

[161] See Essay on Turgot in my *Critical Miscellanies*, *Second Series*.

[162] Such, as that their feudal rights should be confirmed; that none but nobles should carry arms, or be eligible for the army; that *lettres-de-cachet* should continue; that the press should not be free; that the wine trade should not be free internally or for export; that breaking up wastes and enclosing commons should be prohibited; that the old arrangement of the militia should remain. — Arthur Young's *France*, ch. xxi. p. 607.

[163] *Ib.* ch. xxi.

[164] *Critical Miscellanies*, *Second Series*, p. 202.

[165] *Travels in France*, p. 600.

[166] *Travels in France*, i. 63.

[167] Rosenkranz, i. 219.

[168] *Avert*. to vol. iii

[169] Diderot, *Œuv.*, iv. 24.

[170] Diderot's *Leben*, i. 157.

[171] *Œuv.*, xx. 132.

[172] The writer was one Romilly, who had been elected a minister of one of the French Protestant churches in London. See *Memoirs of Sir Samuel Romilly*, vol. i.

[173] I have no space to quote an interesting page in this article on the characteristics and the varying destinies of genius. “We must rank in this class Pindar, Æschylus, Moses, Jesus Christ, Mahomet, Shakespeare, Roger Bacon, and Paracelsus.” xvii. 265-267.

[174] The same idea is found still more ardently expressed in one of his letters to Mdlle. de Voland (Oct. 15, 1759, xviii. 408), where he defends the eagerness of those who have loved one another during life, to be placed side by side after death.

[175] xiv. 32.

[176] *S.v.* Sarrasins, xvii. 82. See also xviii. 429, for Diderot’s admiration of Sadi.

[177] S. v. *Pyrrhonienne*.

[178] *E.g.* in the article on *Plaisir*, xvi. p. 298.

[179] To Damilaville, 1766, xix. 477.

[180] xx. 34.

[181] xvi. 280.

[182] See also article *Indépendance*.

[183] iv. 93.

[184] The reader will find abundant information and criticism upon the Wolffian Philosophy in Professor Edward Caird’s *Critical Account of the Philosophy of Kant*, recently published at Glasgow.

[185] xvi. 491, 492.

[186] There are casual criticisms on Spinosa in the articles on *Identity* and *Liberty*.

[187] xv. 501.

[188] xix. 435, 436.

[189] See below, vol. ii.

[190] S.v. *Luxe*, xvi. 23.

[191] As an illustration how much these ideas were in the air, the reader may refer to a passage in Sédaine's popular comedy, *The Philosopher without knowing it* (1765), Act II. sc. 4. Vanderk, among other things, says of the merchant: "Ce n'est pas un temple, ce n'est pas une seule nation qu'il sert; il les sert toutes, et en est servi: c'est l'homme de l'univers. Quelques particuliers audacieux font armer les rois, la guerre s'allume, tout s'embrase, l'Europe est divisée: mais ce négociant anglais, hollandais, russe ou chinois, n'en est pas moins l'ami de mon coeur: nous sommes sur la superficie de la terre autant de fils de soie qui lient ensemble les nations, et les ramènent à la paix par la nécessité du commerce; voila, mon fils, ce que c'est qu'un honnête négociant."

[192] The younger sister of Diderot's Sophie.

[193] xviii. 454.

[194] See below, the chapter on *Rameau's Nephew*.

[195] Nov. 10, 1770; xix. 22.

[196] See, for instance, xix. 81, 91, 129, 133, 145, etc. — passages which Mr. Carlyle and Rosenkranz have either overlooked, or else, without any good reason, disbelieved.

[197] xviii. 293.

[198] xix. 46.

[199] xix. 84. See also 326.

[200] xix. 137, 341, etc.

[201] xviii. 535.

[202] xviii. 507, etc.

[203] xviii. 526, 531.

[204] Nov. 2, 1759; xviii. 431.

[205] xix. 82.

[206] xix. 139.

[207] xix. 107.

[208] xix. 181.

[209] xix. 81.

[210] xix. 149.

[211] xix. 90.

[212] xix. 163, 164.

[213] Sept. 20, 1765; xix. 179-187.

[214] xviii. 476, 478.

[215] xviii. 479. Comte writes more seriously somewhat in the same sense: “For thirty centuries the priestly castes of China, and still more of India, have been watching our Western transition; to them it must appear mere agitation, as puerile as it is tempestuous, with nothing to harmonise its different phases but their common inroad upon unity.” *Positive Polity*, iv. 11 (English Translation)

[216] xix. 233.

[217] Voltaire’s Satire on the Economists.

[218] Oct. 8, 1768; xix. 832.

[219] xviii. 509.

[220] xviii. 513.

[221] xviii. 511-513.

[222] xix. 244.

[223] xviii. 459.

[224] xix. 259.

[225] *Lettres de Mdlle. de Lespinasse*, viii. p. 20. (Ed. Asse, 1876.)

[226] Aug. 1, 1769; xix. 365.

[227] (1765-69) xix. 381-412. Also p. 318.

[228] June 1756; xix. 433-436.

[229] Aug. 1762; xix. 112.

[230] In *Rousseau*, vol. i. ch. vii. (Globe 8vo, ed.)

[231] Dec. 1757; xix. 446.

[232] xix. 449.

[233] Dec. 20, 1765; xix. 210.

[234] See *Rousseau*, vol. i. ch. vii. (Globe 8vo. ed.)

[235] Oct. 9, 1759; xviii. 397.

[236] Nov. 6, 1760; xix. 17.

[237] Sept. 17, 1761; xix. 47.

[238] Sept. 17, 1769; xix. 320.

[239] *Lettres sur le Commerce de la Librairie*, xviii. 47.

[240] See *Rousseau*, vol. ii. ch. i. (Globe 8vo. ed.)

[241] Diderot's *Lettre sur le Commerce de la Librairie* (1767). *Œuv.*, xviii.

[242] Those who are interested in the history of authorship may care to know the end of the matter. Copyright is no modern practice, and the perpetual right of authors, or persons to whom they had ceded it, was recognised in France through the whole of the seventeenth century and three-quarters of the eighteenth. The perpetuity of the right had produced literary properties of considerable value; for example, Boudot's Dictionary was sold by his executors for 24,000 livres; Prévot's Manual Lexicon and two Dictionaries for 115,000 livres. But in 1777 — ten years after Diderot's plea — the Council decreed that copyright was a privilege and an exercise of the royal grace. The motives for this reduction of an author's right from a transferable property to a terminable privilege seem to have been, first, the general mania of the time for drawing up the threads of national life into the hands of the administration, and second, the hope of making money by a tariff of permissions. The Constituent Assembly dealt with the subject with no intelligence nor care, but the Convention passed a law recognising in the author an exclusive right for his life, and giving a property for ten years after his death to heirs or *cessionaires*. The whole history is elaborately set forth in the collection of documents entitled *La Propriété littéraire au 18ième siècle*. (Hachette, 1859.)

[243] Oct. 11, 1759; xviii. 401.

[244] xix. 319, 320.

[245] *Miscellaneous Works*, p. 73.

[246] Walpole to Selwyn. 1765. Jesse's *Selwyn*, ii. 9. See also Walpole to Mann, iv. 283.

[247] D'Epinay, ii. 4, 138, 153, etc.

[248] See Comte's *Positive Polity*, vol. iii.

[249] "*That virtue of originality that men so strain after is not newness, as they vainly think (there is nothing new), it is only genuineness.*" — Ruskin.

[250] Lessing: 1729-81. Diderot: 1713-84. As De Quincey puts it, Lessing may be said to have begun his career precisely in the middle of the last century.

[251] *Hamburg. Dramaturgie*, § 85. Werke, vi. 381. (Ed. 1873.)

[252] Diderot's *Leben*, i. 274, 277.

[253] *Corr. Lit.*, ii. 103.

[254] See Grimm's account of the performance, *Corr. Lit.*, vii. 313.

[255] Act IV. sc. 3.

[256] Act V. sc. 3.

[257] *De la Poésie Dramatique*, ch. xxi.

[258] vii. 107.

[259] Nov. 28, 1760; xix. 457.

[260] *Lettre sur les Sourds et les Muets*, i. 359.

[261] *Correspond. du Roi Stanislas-Auguste et de Mdme. Geoffrin,* p. 466.

[262] Aug. 1769; xix. 314-323.

[263] Quoted in Mr. Sime's excellent *Life of Lessing* (Trübner and Co., 1877), p. 230.

[264] *De la Poésie Dramatique*, § 2, vii. 313.

[265] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, iv. 177 (ed. 1837).

[266] *Père de Famille*, Act II. sc. 2, p. 211.

[267]xix. 474.

[268] *Paradoxe sur le Comédien*, p. 383.

[269] *Journals*, ii. 331. Also vi. 248; vii. 9.

[270] *Réflexions sur Térence*, v. 228-238. In another place (*De la Poésie Dram.*, 370) he says: "Nous avons des comédies. Les Anglais n'ont que des satires, à la vérité pleines de force et de gaieté, mais sans mœurs et sans goût. Les Italiens en sont réduits au drame burlesque."

[271] vii. 95.

[272] *Lettre sur les Sourds et les Muets*, i. 355.

[273] *Paradoxe*, viii. 384. The criticism on the detestable rendering of *Hamlet* by Ducis (viii. 471) makes one doubt whether Diderot knew much about Shakespeare.

[274] Letter to Mdlle. Jodin, xix. 387.

[275] Johnson one day said to John Kemble: "Are you, sir, one of those enthusiasts who believe yourself transformed into the very character you represent?" Kemble answered that he had never felt so strong a persuasion himself. *Boswell*, ch. 77.

[276] Lessing makes this a starting-point of his criticism of the art of acting, though he uses it less absolutely than Diderot would do. *Hamburg. Dramaturgie*, § 3, vol. vi. 19.

[277] In Lichtenberg's *Briefe aus England* (1776) there is a criticism of the most admirably intelligent kind on Garrick. Lord Lytton gave an account of it to English readers in the *Fortnightly Review* (February 1871). The following passage confirms what Diderot says above:

"You have doubtless heard much of his extraordinary power of change of face. Here is one example of it. When he played the part of Sir John Brute, I was close to the stage, and could observe him narrowly. He entered with the corners of his mouth so turned down, as to give to his whole countenance the expression of habitual sottishness and debauchery. And this artificial form of the mouth he retained, unaltered, from the beginning to the end of the play, with the exception only that, as the play went on, the lips gaped and hung more and more in proportion to the gradually increasing drunkenness of the character represented. This made-up face was not produced by stage-paint, but solely by muscular contraction; and it must be so identified by Garrick with his idea of Sir John Brute as to be spontaneously assumed by him whenever he plays that part; otherwise, his retention of such a mask, without even once dropping it either from fatigue or surprise, even in the most boisterous action of his part, would be quite inexplicable."

[278] viii. 382.

[279] viii. 373, 376, etc.

[280] As Hamlet to his players: "Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand thus; but use all gently; for in the very torrent, tempest, and (as I may say) the whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness."

[281] To Jodin, xix, 382. “Point de hoquets, point de cris, de la dignité vraie, un jeu ferme, sensé, raisonné, juste, mâle; la plus grande sobriété de gestes. C’est de la contenance, c’est du maintien, qu’il faut déclamer les trois quarts du temps.” — P. 390.

[282] P. 395.

[283] *Bijoux Indiscrets*, ch. xxxviii.

[284] vii. 121. Lessing makes a powerful addition to this. *Hamburg. Dram.* vi. 261.

[285] *Poésie Dramatique*, §§ 20, 21.

[286] *Sienne Entretien*, vii. 138.

[287] *Poés. Dram.*., § 2. The Poetics of the Genre Sérieux are to be found, vii. 137, 138.

[288] i. 316.

[289] *Hints for an Essay on the Drama*, p. 155.

[290] *Hist. du Romantisme*, p. 93.

[291] *Der Gegensatz des Classischen und des Romantischen, etc.* By Conrad Hermann, p. 66.

[292] Schopenhauer, *Ethik*, 199

[293] *Œuv.*, iv. 29.

[294] *Werke*, xxv. 291.

[295] The original of the text, published in the Assézat edition of Diderot’s works, was a manuscript found, with other waifs and strays of the eighteenth century, in a chest that had belonged to Messrs. Würtel and Treutz, the publishers at Strasburg. Its authenticity is corroborated by the fact that in the places where Goethe has marked an omission, we find stories or expressions from which we understand only too well why Goethe forbore to reproduce them.

[296] v. 339.

[297] Lucian, Περι Παρασίτον, and Περι των επι μίσφω συνόντων.

[298] Grimm, ix. 349.

[299] *Anmerkungen, Rameau's Neffe; Werke*, xxv. 268.

VOLUME II.

CHAPTER I. OTHER DIALOGUES.



WE MAY NOW pass to performances that are nearer to the accepted surface of things. A short but charming example of Diderot's taste for putting questions of morals in an interesting way, is found in the *Conversation of a Father with his Children* (published in 1773). This little dialogue is perfect in the simple realism of its form. Its subject is the peril of setting one's own judgment of some special set of circumstances above the law of the land. Diderot's venerable and well-loved father is sitting in his arm-chair before the fire. He begins the discussion by telling his two sons and his daughter, who are tending him with pious care, how very near he had once been to destroying their inheritance. An old priest had died leaving a considerable fortune. There was believed to be no will, and the next of kin were a number of poor people whom the inheritance would have rescued from indigence for the rest of their days. They appointed the elder Diderot to guard their interests and divide the property. He finds at the bottom of a disused box of ancient letters, receipts, and other waste-paper, a will made long years ago, and bequeathing all the fortune to a very rich bookseller in Paris. There was every reason to suppose that the old priest had forgotten the existence of the will, and it involved a revolting injustice. Would not Diderot be fulfilling the dead man's real wishes by throwing the unwelcome document into the flames?

At this point in the dialogue the doctor enters the room and interrupts the tale. It appears that he is fresh from the bedside of a criminal who is destined to the gallows. Diderot the younger reproaches him for labouring to keep in the world an offender whom it were best to send out of it with all despatch. The duty of the physician is to say to so execrable a patient— "I will not busy myself in restoring to life a creature whom it is enjoined upon

me by natural equity, the good of society, the well-being of my fellow-creatures, to give up. Die, and let it never be said that through my skill there exists a monster the more on earth!" The doctor parries these energetic declamations with sufficient skill. "My business is to cure, not to judge; I shall cure him, because that is my trade; then the judge will have him hung, because that is his trade." This episodic discussion ended, the story of the will is resumed. The father, when on the point of destroying it, was seized with a scruple of conscience, and hastened to a curé well versed in casuistry. As in England the agents of the law itself not seldom play the part of arbitrary benevolence, which the old Diderot would fain have played against the law, the scene may perhaps be worth transcribing:

"'Nothing is more praiseworthy, sir, than the sentiment of compassion that touches you for these unfortunate people. Suppress the testament and succour them — good; but on condition of restoring to the rightful legatee the exact sum of which you deprive him, neither more nor less. Who authorised you to give a sanction to documents, or to take it away? Who authorised you to interpret the intentions of the dead?'

'But then, father Bouin, the old box?'

'Who authorised you to decide whether the will was thrown away on purpose, or mislaid by accident? Has it never happened to you to do such a thing, and to find at the bottom of a chest some valuable paper that you had tossed there inadvertently?'

'But, father Bouin, the far-off date of the paper, and its injustice?'

'Who authorised you to pronounce on the justice or injustice of the document, and to regard the bequest as an unlawful gift, rather than as a restitution or any other lawful act which you may choose to imagine?'

'But, these poor kinsfolk here on the spot, and that mere collateral, distant and wealthy?'

‘Who authorised you to weigh in your balance what the dead man owed to his distant relations, whom you don’t know?’

‘But, father Bouin, that pile of letters from the legatee, which the departed never even took the trouble to open?’

‘There is neither old box, nor date, nor letters, nor father Bouin, nor if, nor but, in the case. No one has any right to infringe the laws, to enter into the intention of the dead, or to dispose of other people’s property. If providence has resolved to chastise either the heir or the legatee or the testator — we cannot tell which — by the accidental preservation of the will, the will must remain.’”[1]

Diderot the younger declaims against all this with his usual vehemence, while his brother, the abbé, defends the supremacy of the law on the proper ground, that to evade or defy it in any given case is to open the door to the sophistries of all the knaves in the universe. At this point a journeyman of the neighbourhood comes in with a new case of conscience. His wife has died after twenty years of sickness; in these twenty years the cost of her illness has consumed all that he would otherwise have saved for the end of his days. But, as it happens, the marriage portion that she brought him has lain untouched. By law this ought to go to her family. Equity, however, seems to justify him in keeping what he might have spent if he had chosen. He consults the party round the fire. One bids him keep the money; another forbids him; a third thinks it fair for him to repay himself the cost of his wife’s illness. Diderot’s father cries out, that since on his own confession the detention of the inheritance has brought him no comfort, he had better surrender it as speedily as possible, and eat, drink, sleep, work, and make himself happy so.

“‘Not I,’ cried the journeyman abruptly, ‘I shall be off to Geneva.’

‘And dost thou think to leave remorse behind?’

‘I can’t tell, but to Geneva I go.’

‘Go where thou wilt, there wilt thou find thy conscience.’

The hatter went away; his odd answer became the subject of our talk. We agreed that perhaps distance of place and time had the effect of weakening all the feelings more or less, and stifling the voice of conscience even in cases of downright crime. The assassin transported to the shores of China is too far off to perceive the corpse that he has left bleeding on the banks of the Seine.

Remorse springs perhaps less from horror of self than from fear of others; less from shame for the deed, than from the blame and punishment that would attend its discovery. And what clandestine criminal is tranquil enough in his obscurity not to dread the treachery of some unforeseen circumstance, or the indiscretion of some thoughtless word? What certainty can he have that he will not disclose his secret in the delirium of fever, or in dreams? People will understand him if they are on the scene of the action, but those about him in China will have no key to his words.”[2]

Two other cases come up. Does the husband or wife who is the first to break the marriage vow, restore liberty to the other? Diderot answered affirmatively. The second case arose from a story that the abbé had been reading. A certain honest cobbler of Messina saw his country overrun by lawlessness. Each day was marked by a crime. Notorious assassins braved the public exasperation. Parents saw their daughters violated; the industrious saw the fruits of their toil ravished from them by the monopolist or the fraudulent tax-gatherer. The judges were bribed, the innocent were afflicted, the guilty escaped unharmed. The cobbler meditating on these enormities devised a plan of vengeance. He established a secret court of justice in his shop; he heard the evidence, gave a verdict, pronounced sentence, and went out into the street with his gun under his cloak to execute it. Justice done, he regained his stall, rejoicing as though he had slain a rabid dog. When some fifty criminals had thus met their doom, the

viceroy offered a reward of two thousand crowns for information of the slayer, and swore on the altar that he should have full pardon if he gave himself up. The cobbler presented himself, and spoke thus: “I have done what was your duty. ’Tis I who condemned and put to death the miscreants that you ought to have punished. Behold the proofs of their crimes. There you will see the judicial process which I observed. I was tempted to begin with yourself; but I respected in your person the august master whom you represent. My life is in your hands: dispose of it as you think right.” Well, cried the abbé, the cobbler, in spite of all his fine zeal for justice, was simply a murderer. Diderot protested. His father decided that the abbé was right, and that the cobbler was an assassin.

Nothing short of a transcript of the whole would convey a right idea of the dramatic ease of this delightful dialogue — its variety of illustration with unity of topic, the naturalness of movement, the pleasant lightness of touch. At its close the old man calls for his nightcap; Diderot embraces him, and in bidding him good-night whispers in his ear, “Strictly speaking, father, there are no laws for the sage. All being open to exception, ’tis for him to judge the cases in which we ought to submit to them, or to throw them over.” “I should not be sorry,” his father answers, “if there were in the town one or two citizens like thee; but nothing would induce me to live there, if they all thought in that way.” The conclusion is just, and Diderot might have verified it by the state of the higher society of his country at that very moment. One cause of the moral corruption of France in the closing years of the old *régime* was undoubtedly the lax and shifting interpretations, by which the Jesuit directors had softened the rigour of general moral principles. Many generations must necessarily elapse before a habit of loosely superseding principles in individual cases produces widespread demoralisation, but the result is inevitable, sooner or later; and this, just in proportion as the principles are sound. The casuists practically constructed a

system for making the observance alike of the positive law, and of the accepted ethical maxims, flexible and conditional. The Diderot of the present dialogue takes the same attitude, but has the grace to leave the demonstration of its impropriety to his wise and benevolent sire.

II. We shall presently see that Diderot did not shrink from applying a vigorous doubt to some of the most solidly established principles of modern society. Let us meanwhile in passing notice that short piece of plangent irony, which did not appear until many years after his death (1798), and which he or some one else entitled, *On the inconsistency of the Public Judgment on our Private Actions*. This too is in the form of dialogue, but the argument of the story is in its pith as follows. Desroches, first an abbé, then a lawyer, lastly a soldier, persuades a rich and handsome widow to marry him. She is aware of his previous gallantries, and warns him in very dramatic style before a solemn gathering of friends, that if he once wounds her by an infidelity, she will shut herself up and speedily die of grief. He makes such vows as most men would make under such circumstances; he presses her hands ardently to his lips, bedews them with his tears, and moves the whole company to sympathy with his own agitation. The scene is absurd enough, or seems so to us dull people of phlegmatic habit. Yet Diderot, even for us, redeems it by the fine remark: "'Tis the effect of what is good and virtuous to leave a large assembly with only one thought and one soul. How all respect one another, love one another in such moments! For instance, how beautiful humanity is at the play! Ah, why must we part so quickly? Men are so good, so happy, when what is worthy unites all their suffrages, melts them, makes them one."[3] For some time all went well, and our pair were the happiest of men and women. Then various assaults were made on the faithfulness of Desroches. He resisted them, until in endeavouring to serve a friend he was forced to

sue for the goodwill of a lady with whom in his unregenerate days he had had passages of gallantry. The old intrigue was renewed. Letters of damning proof fell by ill hazard into his wife's hands. She reassembled her friends, denounced the culprit, and forthwith carried away her child to seek shelter with her aged mother. Desroches's fervent remorse was unheeded, his letters were sent back unopened, he was denied the door. Presently, the aged mother died. Then the infant. Lastly, the wife herself. Now, says Diderot to his interlocutor, I pray you to turn your eyes to the public — that imbecile crowd that pronounces judgment on us, that disposes of our honour, that lifts us to the clouds or trails us through the mud. Opinion passed through every phase about Desroches. The shifting event is ever their one measure of praise and blame. A fault which nobody thought more than venial became gradually aggravated in their eyes by a succession of incidents which it was impossible for Desroches either to foresee or to prevent. At first opinion was on his side, and his wife was thought to have carried things with too high a hand. Then, after she had fallen ill, and her child had died, and her aged mother had passed away in the fulness of years, he began to be held answerable for all this sea of troubles. Why had not Desroches written to his wife, beset her doors, waylaid her as she went to church? He had, as matter of fact, done all these things, but the public did not know it. The important thing is, not to know, but to talk. Then, as it befell, his wife's brother took Desroches's place in his regiment; there he was killed. More exclamations as to the misfortune of being connected with such a man. How was Desroches responsible for the death of his mother-in-law, already well stricken in years? How could he foresee that a hostile ball would pierce his brother-in-law in his first campaign? But his wife? He must be a barbarian, a monster, who had gradually pressed a poniard into the bosom of a divine woman, his wife, his benefactress, and then left her to die, without showing the least sign of interest or feeling. And all this, cries Diderot, for not

knowing what was concealed from him, and what was unknown and unsuspected even by those who were daily about her? What presumption, what bad logic, what incoherence, what unjustified veering and vacillation in all these public verdicts from beginning to end!

Yet we feel that Diderot's impetuous taunts fail to press to the root of the matter. Diderot excels in opening a subject; he places it in a new light; he furnishes telling concrete illustrations; he thoroughly disturbs and unsettles the medium of conventional association in which it has become fixed. But he does not leave the question readjusted. His mind was not of that quality which is slow to complain where it cannot explain; which does not quit a discussion without a calm and orderly review of the conditions that underlie the latest exhibition of human folly, shortsightedness, or injustice. The public condemnation of Desroches for consequences that were entirely strange to his one offence, was indefensible on grounds of strict logic. But then men have imagination as well as reason. Imagination is stronger than reason with most of them. Their imagination was touched by the series of disasters that followed Madame Desroches's abandonment of her husband. They admit no plea of remoteness of damage, such as law courts allow. In a way that was loose and unreasonable, but still easily intelligible, the husband became associated with a sequel for which he was not really answerable. If the world's conduct in such cases were accurately expressed, it would perhaps be found that people have really no intention to pronounce a judicial sentence; they only mean that an individual's associations have become disagreeable and doubtful to them. They may think proper to justify the grievously meagre definition of *homo* as *animal rationale*, by varnishing their distaste with reasons; the true reason is that the presence of a Desroches disturbs their comfort, by recalling questionable and disorderly circumstances. That this selfish and rough method many a time inflicts horrible cruelty is too certain, and those to whom the idea of conduct is

serious and deep-reaching will not fall into it. A sensible man is aware of the difficulty of pronouncing wisely upon the conduct of others, especially where it turns upon the intricate and unknowable relations between a man and a woman. He will not, however, on that account break down the permanent safeguards, for the sake of leniency in a given case. *A great enemy to indifference, a great friend to indulgence*, said Turgot of himself; and perhaps it is what we should all do well to be able to say of ourselves.

Again, though these ironical exposures of the fatuity and recklessness and inconsistency of popular verdicts are wholesome enough in their degree in all societies, yet it has been, and still remains, a defect of some of the greatest French writers to expect a fruit from such performances which they can never bear. In the long run a great body of men and women is improved less by general outcry against its collective characteristics than by the inculcation of broader views, higher motives, and sounder habits of judgment, in such a form as touches each man and woman individually. It is better to awaken in the individual a sense of responsibility for his own character than to do anything, either by magnificent dithyrambs or penetrating satire, to dispose him to lay the blame on Society. Society is after all only a name for other people. An instructive contrast might be drawn between the method of French writers of genius, from Diderot down to that mighty master of our own day, Victor Hugo, in pouring fulminant denunciations upon Society, and the other method of our best English writers, from Milton down to Mill, in impressing new ideas on the Individual, and exacting a vigorous personal answer to the moral or spiritual call.

One other remark may be worth making. It is characteristic of the immense sociability of the eighteenth century, that when he saw Desroches sitting alone in the public room, receiving no answers to his questions, never addressed by any of those around him, avoided, coldly eyed, and

morally proscribed, Diderot never thought of applying the artificial consolation of the Stoic. He never dreamed of urging that expulsion from the society of friends was not a hardship, a true punishment, and a genuine evil. No one knew better than Diderot that a man should train himself to face the disapprobation of the world with steadfast brow and unflinching gaze; but he knew also that this is only done at great cost, and is only worth doing for clear and far-reaching objects. Life was real to Diderot, not in the modern canting sense of earnestness and making a hundred thousand pounds; but in the sense of being an agitated scene of living passion, interest, sympathy, struggle, delight, and woe, in which the graceful ascetic commonplaces of the writer and the preacher barely touch the actual conditions of human experience, or go near to softening the smart of chagrin, failure, mistake, and sense of wrong, any more than the sweet music of the birds poised in air over a field of battle can still the rage and horror of the plain beneath. As was said by a good man, who certainly did not fail to try the experiment,— "Speciosa quidem ista sunt, oblitaque rhetoricæ et musicæ melle dulcedinis; tum tantum cum audiuntur oblectant. Sed miseris malorum altior sensus est. Itaque quum hæc auribus insonare desierint, insitus animum mœror prægravat."[4]

III. We may close this chapter with a short account of the *Supplement to Bougainville's Travels*, which was composed in 1772, and published twenty-four years later. The second title is, *A dialogue on the disadvantage of attaching moral ideas to certain physical actions which do not really comport with them*. Those who believe that the ruling system of notions about marriage represents the last word that is to be said as to the relations between men and women, will turn away from Diderot's dialogue with some impatience. Those, on the contrary, who hold that the present system is no more immovably fixed in ultimate laws of human nature, no more

final, no more unimprovable, no more sacred, and no more indisputably successful, than any other set of social arrangements and the corresponding moral ideas, will find something to interest them, though, as it seems to the present writer, very little to instruct. Bougainville was the first Frenchman who sailed round the world. He did in 1766-69 what Captain Cook did about the same time. The narrative of his expedition appeared in 1771, and the picture of life among the primitive people of the Southern Seas touched Diderot almost as deeply as if he had been Rousseau. As one says so often in this history of the intellectual preparation for the Revolution, the corruption and artificiality of Parisian society had the effect of colouring the world of primitive society with the very hues of paradise. Diderot was more free from this besetting weakness than any of his contemporaries. He never fell into Voltaire's fancy that China is a land of philosophers.[5] But he did not look very critically into the real conditions of life in the more rudimentary stages of development, and for the moment he committed the sociological anachronism of making the poor people of Otaheite into wise and benevolent patriots and sound reasoners. The literary merit of the dialogue is at least as striking as in any of the pieces of which we have already spoken. The realism of the scenes between the ship-chaplain and his friendly savage, with too kindly wife, and daughters as kindly as either, is full of sweetness, simplicity, and a sort of pathos. A subject which easily takes on an air of grossness, and which Diderot sometimes handled very grossly indeed, is introduced with an idyllic grace that to the pure will hardly be other than pure. We have of course always to remember that Diderot is an author for grown-up people, as are the authors of the Bible or any other book that deals with more than the surface of human experience. Our English practice of excluding from literature subjects and references that are unfit for boys and girls, has something to recommend it, but it undeniably leads to a certain narrowness and thinness, and to some most

nauseous hypocrisy. All subjects are evidently not to be discussed by all; and one result in our case is that some of the most important subjects in the world receive no discussion whatever.

The position which Diderot takes up in the present dialogue may be inferred from the following extract. The ship-chaplain has been explaining to the astonished Otaheitan the European usage of strict monogamy, as the arrangement enjoined upon man by the Creator of the universe, and vigilantly guarded by the priest and the magistrate. To which, Orou thus:

“These singular precepts I find opposed to nature and contrary to reason. They are contrary to nature because they suppose that a being who thinks, feels, and is free, can be the property of a creature like itself. Dost thou not see that in thy land they have confounded the thing that has neither sensibility, nor thought, nor desire, nor will; that one leaves, one takes, one keeps, one exchanges, without its suffering or complaining — with a thing that is neither exchanged nor acquired, that has freedom, will, desire, that may give or may refuse itself for the moment; that complains and suffers; and that cannot become a mere article of commerce, unless you forget its character and do violence to nature? And they are contrary to the general law of things. Can anything seem more senseless to thee than a precept which proscribes the law of change that is within us, and which commands a constancy that is impossible, and that violates the liberty of the male and the female, by chaining them together in perpetuity; — anything more senseless than are oaths of immutability, taken by two creatures of flesh, in the face of a sky that is not an instant the same, under vaults that threaten ruin, at the base of a rock crumbling to dust, at the foot of a tree that is splitting asunder?... You may command what is opposed to nature, but you will not be obeyed. You will multiply evil-doers and the unhappy by fear, by punishment, and by remorse; you will deprave men’s consciences; you

will corrupt their minds; they will have lost the polar star of their pathway." (225.)

After this declamation he proceeds to put some practical questions to the embarrassed chaplain. Are young men in France always continent, and wives always true, and husbands never libertines? The chaplain's answers disclose the truth to the keen-eyed Orou:

"What a monstrous tissue is this that thou art unfolding to me! And even now thou dost not tell me all; for as soon as men allow themselves to dispose at their own will of the ideas of what is just and unjust, to take away, or to impose an arbitrary character on things; to unite to actions or to separate from them the good and the evil, with no counsellor save caprice — then come blame, accusation, suspicion, tyranny, envy, jealousy, deception, chagrin, concealment, dissimulation, espionage, surprise, lies; daughters deceive their parents, wives their husbands, husbands their wives; young women, I don't doubt, will smother their children; suspicious fathers will despise and neglect their children; mothers will leave them to the mercy of accident; and crime and debauchery will show themselves in every guise. I know all that, as if I had lived among you. It is so, because it must be so; and that society of thine, in spite of thy chief who vaunts its fine order, is nothing but a collection of hypocrites who secretly trample the laws under foot; or of unfortunate wretches who make themselves the instrument of their own punishment, by submitting to these laws; or of imbeciles, in whom prejudice has absolutely stifled the voice of nature." (227.)

The chaplain has the presence of mind to fall back upon the radical difficulty of all such solutions of the problem of family union as were practised in Otaheite, or were urged by philosophers in Paris, or are timidly suggested in our own times in the droll-sounding form of marriages for terms of years with option of renewal. That difficulty is the disposal of the

children which are the fruit of such unions. Orou rejoins to this argument by a very eloquent account how valuable, how sought after, how prized, is the woman who has her quiver full of them. His contempt for the condition of Europe grows more intense, as he learns that the birth of a child among the bulk of the people of the west is rather a sorrow, a perplexity, a hardship, than a delight and ground of congratulation.

The reader sees by this time that in the present dialogue Diderot is really criticising the most fundamental and complex arrangement of our actual western society, from the point of view of an arbitrary and entirely fanciful naturalism. Rousseau never wrote anything more picturesque, nor anything more dangerous, nor more anarchic and superficially considered. It is true that Diderot at the close of the discussion is careful to assert that while we denounce senseless laws, it is our duty to obey them until we have procured their reform. "He who of his own private authority infringes a bad law, authorises every one else to infringe good laws. There are fewer inconveniences in being mad with the mad, than in being wise by oneself. Let us say to ourselves, let us never cease to cry aloud, that people attach shame, chastisement, and infamy to acts that in themselves are innocent; but let us abstain from committing them, because shame, punishment, and infamy are the greatest of evils." And we hear Diderot's sincerest accents when he says, "Above all, one must be honest, and true to a scruple, with the fragile beings who cannot yield to our pleasures without renouncing the most precious advantages of society."[6]

This, however, does not make the philosophical quality of the discussion any more satisfactory. Whatever changes may ultimately come about in the relations between men and women, we may at least be sure that such changes will be in a direction even still further away than the present conditions of marriage, from anything like the naturalism of Diderot and the eighteenth-century school. Even if — what does not at present seem at all

likely to happen — the idea of the family and the associated idea of private property should eventually be replaced by that form of communism which is to be seen at Oneida Creek, still the discipline of the appetites and affections of sex will necessarily on such a system be not less, but far more rigorous to nature than it is under prevailing western institutions.[7] Orou would have been a thousand times more unhappy among the Perfectionists under Mr. Noyes than in Paris or London. We cannot pretend here to discuss the large group of momentous questions involved, but we may make a short remark or two. One reason why the movement, if progressive, must be in the direction of greater subordination of appetite, is that all experience proves the position and moral worth of women, taking society as a whole, to be in proportion to the self-control of their male companions. Nobody doubts that man is instinctively polygamous. But the dignity and self-respect, and consequently the whole moral cultivation of women, depends on the suppression of this vagrant instinct. And there is no more important chapter in the history of civilisation than the record of the steps by which its violence has been gradually reduced.

There is another side, we admit. The home, of which sentimental philosophers love to talk, is too often a ghastly failure. The conjugal union, so tender and elevating in its ideal, is in more cases than we usually care to recognise, the cruellest of bonds to the woman, the most harassing, deadening, spirit-breaking of all possible influences to the man. The purity of the family, so lovely and dear as it is, has still only been secured hitherto by retaining a vast and dolorous host of female outcasts. When Catholicism is praised for the additions which it has made to the dignity of womanhood and the family, we have to set against that gain the frightful growth of this caste of poor creatures, upon whose heads, as upon the scapegoat of the Hebrew ordinance, we put all the iniquities of the children of the house, and

all their transgressions in all their sins, and then banish them with maledictions into the foul outer wilderness and the land not inhabited.

On this side there is much wholesome truth to be told, in the midst of the complacent social cant with which we are flooded. But Diderot does not help us. Nothing can possibly be gained by reducing the attraction of the sexes to its purely physical elements, and stripping it of all the moral associations which have gradually clustered round it, and acquired such force as in many cases among the highest types of mankind to reduce the physical factor to a secondary place. Such a return to the nakedness of the brute must be retrograde. And Diderot, as it happened, was the writer who, before all others, habitually exalted the delightful and consolatory sentiment of the family. Nobody felt more strongly the worth of domestic ties, when faithfully cherished. It can only have been in a moment of elated paradox that he made one of the interlocutors in the dialogue on Bougainville pronounce Constancy, "The poor vanity of two children who do not know themselves, and who are blinded by the intoxication of a moment to the instability of all that surrounds them:" and Fidelity, "The obstinacy and the punishment of a good man and a good woman:" and Jealousy, "The passion of a miser; the unjust sentiment of man; the consequence of our false manners, and of a right of property extending over a feeling, willing, thinking, free creature."[8]

It is a curious example of the blindness which reaction against excess of ascetic doctrine bred in the eighteenth century, that Diderot should have failed to see that such sophisms as these are wholly destructive of that order and domestic piety, to whose beauty he was always so keenly alive. It is curious, too, that he should have failed to recognise that the erection of constancy into a virtue would have been impossible, if it had not answered first, to some inner want of human character at its best, and second, to some condition of fitness in society at its best.

How is it, says one of the interlocutors, that the strongest, the sweetest, the most innocent of pleasures is become the most fruitful source of depravation and misfortune? This is indeed a question well worth asking. And it is comforting after the anarchy of the earlier part of the dialogue to find so comparatively sensible a line of argument taken in answer as the following. This evil result has been brought about, he says, by the tyranny of man, who has converted the possession of woman into a property; by manners and usages that have overburdened the conjugal union with superfluous conditions; by the civil laws that have subjected marriage to an infinity of formalities; by religious institutions that have attached the name of vices and virtues to actions that are not susceptible of morality. If this means that human happiness will be increased by making the condition of the wife more independent in respect of property; by treating in public opinion separation between husband and wife as a transaction in itself perfectly natural and blameless, and often not only laudable, but a duty; and by abolishing that barbarous iniquity and abomination called restitution of conjugal rights, then the speaker points to what has been justly described as the next great step in the improvement of society. If it means that we do wrong to invest with the most marked, serious, and unmistakable formality an act that brings human beings into existence, with uncounted results both to such beings themselves and to others who are equally irresponsible for their appearance in the world, then the position is recklessly immoral, and it is, moreover, wholly repugnant to Diderot's own better mind.

CHAPTER II. ROMANCE.



THE PRESIDENT DE Brosses on a visit to Paris, in 1754, was anxious to make the acquaintance of that "furious metaphysical head," as he styled Diderot. Buffon introduced him. "He is a good fellow," said the President, "very pleasant, very amiable, a great philosopher, a strong reasoner, but given to perpetual digressions. He made twenty-five digressions yesterday in my room, between nine o'clock and one o'clock." And so it is that a critic who has undertaken to give an account of Diderot, finds himself advancing from digression to digression, through a chain of all the subjects that are under the sun. The same Diderot, however, is present amid them all, and behind each of them; the same fresh enthusiasm, the same expansive sympathy, the same large hospitality of spirit. Always, too, the same habitual reference of ideas, systems, artistic forms, to the complex realities of life, and to these realities as they figured to sympathetic emotions.

It was inevitable that Diderot should make an idol of the author of *Clarissa Harlowe*. The spirit of reaction against the artificiality of the pseudo-classic drama, which drove him to feel the way to a drama of real life in the middle class, made him exult in the romance of ordinary private life which was invented by Richardson. It was no mere accident that the modern novel had its origin in England, but the result of general social causes. The modern novel essentially depends on the interest of the private life of ordinary men and women. But this interest was only possible on condition that the feudal and aristocratic spirit had received its deathblow, and it was only in England that such a revolution had taken place even partially. It was only in England as yet that the middle class had conquered a position of consideration, equality, and independence. Only in England, as has been said, had every man the power of making the best of his own

personality, and arranging his own destiny according to his private goodwill and pleasure.[2] The greatest of Richardson's successors in the history of English fiction adds to this explanation. "Those," says Sir Walter Scott, "who with patience had studied rant and bombast in the folios of Scuderi, could not readily tire of nature, sense, and genius in the octavos of Richardson." The old French romances in which Europe had found a dreary amusement, were stories of princes and princesses. It was to be expected that the first country where princes and princesses were shorn of divinity and made creatures of an Act of Parliament, would also be the country where imagination would be most likely to seek for serious passion, realistic interest, and all the material for pathos and tragedy in the private lives of common individuals. It is true that Marivaux, the author of *Marianne*, was of the school of Richardson before Richardson wrote a word. But this was an almost isolated appearance, and not the beginning of a movement. Richardson's popularity stamped the opening of a new epoch. It was the landmark of a great social, no less than a great literary transition, when all England went mad with enthusiasm over the trials, the virtue, the triumph of a rustic ladies'-maid.

In the literary circles of France the enthusiasm for Richardson was quite as great as it was in England. There it was one of the signs of the certain approach of that transformation which had already taken place in England; the transformation from feudalism to industrial democracy. It may sound a paradox to say that a passion for Richardson was a symbol that a man was truly possessed by the spirit of political revolution. Yet it is true. Voltaire was a revolter against superstition and the tyranny of the church, but he never threw off the monarchic traditions of his younger days; he was always a friend of great nobles; he had no eye and no inclination for social overthrow. And this is what Voltaire said of *Clarissa Harlowe*: "It is cruel for a man like me to read nine whole volumes in which you find nothing at

all. I said — Even if all these people were my relations and friends, I could take no interest in them. I can see nothing in the writer but a clever man who knows the curiosity of the human race, and is always promising something from volume to volume, in order to go on selling them." In the same way, and for exactly the same reasons, he could never understand the enthusiasm for the *New Heloïsa*, the greatest of the romances that were directly modelled on Richardson. He had no vision for the strange social aspirations that were silently haunting the inner mind of his contemporaries. Of these aspirations, in all their depth and significance, Diderot was the half-conscious oracle and unaccepted prophet. It was not deliberate philosophical calculation that made him so, but the spontaneous impulse of his own genius and temperament. He was no conscious political destroyer, but his soul was open to all those voices of sentiment, to all those ideals of domestic life, to those primary forces of natural affection, which were so urgently pressing asunder the old feudal bonds, and so swiftly ripening a vast social crisis. Thus his enthusiasm for Richardson was, at its root, another side of that love of the life of peaceful industry, which gave one of its noblest characteristics to the Encyclopædia.

To this enthusiasm Diderot gave voice in half a dozen pages which are counted among his masterpieces. Richardson died in 1761, and Diderot flung off a commemorative piece, which is without any order and connection; but this makes it more an echo, as he called it, of the tumult of his own heart. Here, indeed, he merits Gautier's laudatory phrase, and is as "flamboyant" as one could desire. To understand the march of feeling in French literature, and to measure the growth and expansion in criticism, we need only compare Diderot's *eloge* on Richardson with Fontenelle's *éloge* on Dangeau or Leibnitz. The exaggerations of phrase, the violences of feeling, the broken apostrophes, give to Diderot's *éloge* an unpleasant tone of declamation. Some of us may still prefer the moderation, the subtlety, the

nice discrimination, of the critics of another school. Still it would be a sign of narrowness and short-sight not to discern the sincerity, the movement, the real meaning underneath all that profusion of glaring colour.

“O Richardson, Richardson, unique among men in my eyes, thou shalt be my favourite all my life long! If I am hard driven by pressing need, if my friend is overtaken by want, if the mediocrity of my fortune is not enough to give my children what is necessary for their education, I will sell my books; but thou shalt remain to me, thou shalt remain on the same shelf with Moses, Homer, Euripides, Sophocles!

“O Richardson, I make bold to say that the truest history is full of falsehoods, and that your romance is full of truths. History paints a few individuals; you paint the human race. History sets down to its few individuals what they have neither said nor done; whatever you set down to man, he has both said and done.... No; I say that history is often a bad novel; and the novel, as you have handled it, is good history. O painter of nature, ’tis you who are never false!

“You accuse Richardson of being long! You must have forgotten how much trouble, pains, busy movement, it costs to bring the smallest undertaking to a good issue, — to end a suit, to settle a marriage, to bring about a reconciliation. Think of these details what you please, but for me they will be full of interest if they are only true, if they bring out the passions, if they display character. They are common, you say; it is all what one sees every day. You are mistaken; ’tis what passes every day before your eyes, and what you never see.”

In Richardson’s work, he says, as in the world, men are divided into two classes, those who enjoy and those who suffer, and it is always to the latter that he draws the mind of the reader. It is due to Richardson, he cries, “if I have loved my fellow-creatures better, and loved my duties better; if I have never felt anything but pity for the bad; if I have conceived a deeper

compassion for the unfortunate, more veneration for the good, more circumspection in the use of present things, more indifference about future things, more contempt for life, more love for virtue." The works of Richardson are his touch-stone; those who do not love them, stand judged and condemned in his eyes. Yet in the midst of this tumult of admiration Diderot admits that the number of readers who will feel all their value can never be great; it requires too severe a taste, and then the variety of events is such, relations are so multiplied, the management of them is so complicated, there are so many things arranged, so many personages! "O Richardson; if thou hast not enjoyed in thy lifetime all the reputation of thy deserts, how great wilt thou be to our grandchildren when they see thee from the distance at which we now view Homer! Then who will there be with daring enough to strike out a line of thy sublime work?"[10] Yet of the very moderate number of living persons who have ever read *Clarissa Harlowe*, it would be safe to say that the large majority have read it in a certain abridgment in three volumes which appeared some years ago.

Doctor Johnson made the answer of true criticism to some one who complained to him that Richardson is tedious. "Why, sir," he said, "if you were to read Richardson for the story, your impatience would be so much frighted that you would hang yourself. But you must read him for the sentiment, and consider the story only as giving occasion to the sentiment." And this is just what Diderot and the Paris of the middle of the eighteenth century were eager to do. It was the sentiment that touched and delighted them in *Clarissa*, just as it was the sentiment that made the fortune of the great romance in their own tongue, which was inspired by *Clarissa*, and yet was so different from *Clarissa*. Rousseau threw into the *New Heloïsa* a glow of passion of which the London printer was incapable, and he added a beauty of external landscape and a strong feeling for the objects and movement of wild natural scenery that are very different indeed from the

atmosphere of the cedar-parlour and the Flask Walk at Hampstead. But the sentiment, the adoration of the *belle âme*, is the same, and it was the *belle âme* that fascinated that curious society, where rude logic and a stern anti-religious dialectic went hand-in-hand with the most tender and exalted sensibility.[11] It is singular that Diderot says nothing about Rousseau's famous romance, and we can only suppose that his silence arose from his contempt for the private perversity and seeming insincerity of the author.

Diderot made one attempt of his own, in which we may notice the influence of the minute realism and the tearful pathos of Richardson. *The Nun* was not given to the world until 1796, when its author had been twelve years in his grave. Since then it has been reproduced in countless editions in France and Belgium, and has been translated into English, Spanish, and German. It fell in with certain passionate movements of the popular mind against some anti-social practices of the Catholic Church. Perhaps it is not unjust to suppose that the horrible picture of the depraved abbess has had some share in attracting a public.

It is thoroughly characteristic of Diderot's dreamy, heedless humour, and of the sincerity both of his interest in his work for its own sake, and of his indifference to the popular voice, that he should have allowed this, like so many other pieces, to lie in his drawer, or at most to circulate clandestinely among three or four of his more intimate friends. It was written about 1760, and ingenious historians have made of it a signal for the great crusade against the Church. In truth, as we have seen, it was a strictly private performance, and could be no signal for a public movement. *La Religieuse* was undoubtedly an expression of the strong feeling of the Encyclopædic school about celibacy, renunciation of the world, and the burial of men and women alive in the cloister.

The circumstances under which the story was written are worthy of a word or two. Among the friends of Madame d'Epinay, Grimm, and Diderot

was a certain Marquis de Croismare. He had deserted the circle, and retired to his estates in Normandy. It occurred to one of them that it would be a pleasant stratagem for recalling him to Paris, to invent a personage who should be shut up in a convent against her will, and then to make this personage appeal to the well-known courage and generosity of the Marquis de Croismare to rescue her. A previous adventure of the Marquis suggested the fiction, and made its success the more probable. Diderot composed the letters of the imaginary nun, and the conspirators had the satisfaction of making merry at supper over the letters which the loyal and unsuspecting Marquis sent in reply. At length the Marquis's interest became so eager that they resolved that the best way of ending his torment was to make the nun die. When the Marquis de Croismare returned to Paris, the plot was confessed, the victim of the mystification laughed at the joke, and the friendship of the party seemed to be strengthened by their common sorrow for the woes of the dead sister. But Diderot had been taken in his own trap. His imagination, which he had set to work in jest, was caught by the figure and the situation. One day while he was busy about the tale, a friend paid him a visit, and found him plunged in grief and his face bathed in tears. "What in the world can be the matter with you?" cried the friend. "What the matter?" answered Diderot in a broken voice; "I am filled with misery by a story that I am writing!" This capacity of thinking of imaginary personages as if they were friends living in the next street, had been stirred by Richardson. His acquaintances would sometimes notice anxiety and consternation on his countenance, and would ask him if anything had befallen his health, his friends, his family, his fortune. "O my friends," he would reply, "Pamela, Clarissa, Grandison ...!" It was in their world, not in the Rue Taranne, that he really lived when these brooding moods overtook him. And while he was writing *The Nun*, Sister Susan and Sister Theresa, the lady superior of Longchamp, and the libertine superior of Saint

Eutropius, were as alive to him as Clarissa was alive to the score of correspondents who begged Richardson to spare her honour, not to let her die, to make Lovelace marry her, or by no means to allow Lovelace to marry her.

The Nun professes to be the story of a young lady whose family have thrust her into a convent, and her narrative, with an energy and reality that Diderot hardly ever surpassed, presents the odious sides of monastic life, and the various types of superstition, tyranny, and corruption that monastic life engenders. Yet Diderot had far too much genius to be tempted into the exaggerations of more vulgar assailants of monkeries and nunneries. He may have begun his work with the purpose of attacking a mischievous and superstitious system that mutilates human life, but he certainly continued it because he became interested in his creations. Diderot was a social destroyer by accident, but in intention he was a truly scientific moralist, penetrated by the spirit of observation and experiment; he shrunk from no excess in dissection, and found nothing in human pathology too repulsive for examination. Yet *The Nun* has none of the artificial violences of the modern French school, which loves moral disease for its own sake. The action is all very possible, and the types are all sufficiently human and probable. The close realistic touches which flowed from the intensity of the writer's illusion, naturally convey a certain degree of the same illusion to the mind of the reader.

Existence as it goes on in these strange hives is caught with what one knows to be true fidelity; its dulness, its littleness, its goings and comings, its spite, its reduction of the spiritual to the most purely mechanical.

"The first moments passed in mutual praises, in questions about the house that I had quitted, in experiments as to my character, my inclinations, my tastes, my understanding. They feel you all over; there is a number of little snares that they set for you, and from which they draw the most just

conclusions. For example, they throw out some word of scandal, and then they look at you; they begin a story, and then wait to see whether you will ask for the end or will leave it there; if you make the most ordinary remark, they declare that it is charming, though they know well enough that it is nothing; they praise or they blame you with a purpose; they try to worm out your most hidden thoughts; they question you as to what you read; they offer you religious books and profane, and carefully notice your choice; they invite you to some slight infractions of the rule; they tell you little confidences, and throw out hints about the foibles of the Lady Superior. All is carefully gathered up and told over again. They leave you, they take you up again; they try to sound your sentiments about manners, about piety, about the world, about religion, about the monastic life, about everything. The result of all these repeated experiments is an epithet that stamps your character, and is always added by way of surname to the name that you already bear. I was called Sister Susan the Reserved."[12]

The portraits we feel to be to the life. The strongest of them all is undoubtedly the most disagreeable, the most atrocious; it is, if you will, the most infamous. We can only endure it as we endure to traverse the ward for epileptics in an hospital for the insane. It is appalling, it fills you with horror, it haunts you for days and nights, it leaves a kind of stain on the memory. It is a possibility of character of which the healthy, the pure, the unthinking have never dreamed. Such a portrait is not art, that is true; but it is science, and that delivers the critic from the necessity of searching his vocabulary for the cheap superlatives of moral censure. Whether it be art or science, however, men cannot but ask themselves how Diderot came to think it worth while to execute so painful a study. The only answer is that the irregularities of human nature — those more shameful parts of it, which in some characters survive the generations of social pressure that have crushed them down in civilised communities — had an irresistible attraction

for the curiosity of his genius. The whole story is full of power; it abounds in phrases that have the stamp of genius; and suppressed vehemence lends to it strength. But it is fatally wanting in the elements of tenderness, beauty, and sympathy. If we chance to take it up for a second or for a tenth time, it infallibly holds us; but nobody seeks to return to it of his own will, and it holds us under protest.

If Richardson created one school in France, Sterne created another. The author of *Tristram Shandy* was himself only a follower of one of the greatest of French originals, and a follower at a long distance. Even those who have the keenest relish for our "good-humoured, civil, nonsensical, Shandean kind of a book," ought to admit how far it falls behind Rabelais in exuberance, force, richness of extravagance, breadth of colour, fulness of blood. They may claim, however, for Sterne what, in comparison with these great elements, are the minor qualities of simplicity, tenderness, precision, and finesse. These are the qualities that delighted the French taste. In 1762 Sterne visited Paris, and found *Tristram Shandy* almost as well known there as in London, and he instantly had dinners and suppers for a fortnight on his hands. Among them were dinners and suppers at Holbach's, where he made the acquaintance of Diderot, and where perhaps he made the discovery that "notwithstanding the French make such a pother about the word *sentiment*, they have no precise idea attached to it."[13] The *Sentimental Journey* appeared in 1768, and was instantly pronounced by the critics in both countries to be inimitable. It is no wonder that a performance of such delicacy of literary expression, united with so much good-nature, such easy, humane, amiable feeling, went to the hearts of the French of the eighteenth century. "My design in it," said Sterne, "was to teach us to love the world and our fellow-creatures better than we do, so it runs most upon those gentle passions and affections which aid so much to it."[14] This exactly fell in with the reigning Parisian modes, and with such sentiment as that of

Diderot most of all. There were several French imitations of the *Sentimental Journey*,[15] but the only one that has survived in popular esteem, if indeed this can be said to have survived, is Diderot's *Jacques le Fataliste*.

It seems to have been composed about the time (1773) of Diderot's journey to Holland and St. Petersburg, of which we shall have more to say in a later chapter. Its history is almost as singular as the history of *Rameau's Nephew*. A contemporary speaks of a score of copies as existing in different parts of Germany, and we may conjecture that they found their way there from friends whom Diderot made in Holland, and some of them were no doubt sent by Grimm to his subscribers. The first fragment of it that saw the light in print was in a translation that Schiller made of its most striking episode, in the year 1785. This is another illustration of the eagerness of the best minds of Germany to possess and diffuse the most original products of French intelligence and hardihood. Diderot, as we have said, stands in the front rank along with Rousseau, along also with Richardson, Sterne, and Goldsmith, among those who in Germany kindled the glow of sentimentalism, both in its good and its bad forms. It was in Germany that the first complete version of the whole of *Jacques le Fataliste* appeared, in 1792. Not until four years later did the French obtain an original transcript. This they owed to the generosity of Prince Henri of Prussia, the brother of Frederick the Great; he presented it to the Institute.

"There is going about here," wrote Goethe in 1780, while Diderot was still alive, "a manuscript of Diderot's called *Jacques le Fataliste et son Maître*, and it is really first-rate — a very fine and exquisite meal, prepared and dished up with great skill, as if for the palate of some singular idol. I set myself in the place of this Bel, and in six uninterrupted hours swallowed all the courses in the order, and according to the intentions, of this excellent cook and *maître d'hôtel*."[16] He goes on to say that when other people came to read it, some preferred one story, and some another. On the whole, one is

strongly inclined to judge that few modern readers will equal Goethe's unsparing appetite. The reader sighs in thinking of the brilliant and unflagging wit, the verve, the wicked graces of *Candide*, and we long for the ease and simplicity and light stroke of the *Sentimental Journey*. Diderot has the German heaviness. Perhaps this is because he had too much conscience, and laboured too deeply under the burdensome problems of the world. He could not emancipate himself sufficiently from the tumult of his own sympathies. At many a page both of *Jacques le Fataliste*, and of others of his pieces, we involuntarily recall the writer's own contention that excess of sensibility makes a mediocre actor. The same law is emphatically true of the artist. Diderot never writes as if his spirit were quite free — and perhaps it never was free. If we are to enjoy these reckless outbursts of all that is bizarre and grotesque, these defiances of all that is sane, coherent, and rational, we must never feel conscious of a limitation, or a possibility of stint or check. The draught must seem to come from an exhaustless fountain of boisterous laughter, irony, and caprice. Perfect fooling is so rare an art, that not half a dozen men in literature have really possessed it; perhaps only Aristophanes, Rabelais, Shakespeare. *Candide*, wonderful as it is, has many a stroke of malice, and *Tristram Shandy*, wonderful as that is too, is not without tinges of self-consciousness; and neither malice nor self-consciousness belongs to the greater gods of buffoonery. Cervantes and Molière, those great geniuses of finest temper, still have none of the reckless buffoonery of such scenes as that between Prince Henry and the drawer, or the mad extravagances of the *Merry Wives*; still less of the wild topsy-turvy of the *Birds* or the *Peace*. They have not the note of true Pantagruelism. Most critics, again, would find in Swift a truculence, sometimes latent and sometimes flagrant, that would deprive him, too, of his place among these great masters of free and exuberant farce. Diderot, at any rate, must rank in the second class among those who have attempted to

tread a measure among the whimsical zigzags of unreason. The sincere sentimentalist makes a poor reveller.

We have spoken, as many others have done before us, of Diderot as imitating our two English celebrities, and in one sense that is a perfectly true description. In *Jacques le Fataliste* whole sentences are transcribed in letter and word from *Tristram Shandy*. Yet imitation is hardly the right word for the process by which Diderot showed that an author had seized and affected him. *La Religieuse* would not have been written if there had been no Richardson, nor *Jacques le Fataliste* if there had been no Sterne; yet Diderot's work is not really like the work of either of his celebrated contemporaries. They gave him the suggestion of a method and a sentiment to start from, and he mused and brooded over it until, from among the clouds of his imagination, there began to loom figures of his own, moving along a path which was also his own. This was the history of his adaptation of *The Natural Son* from Goldoni. We can only be sure that nothing became blithe in its passage through his mind. He was too much of a preacher to be an effective humorist.

There is in *Jacques le Fataliste* none of that gift of true creation which produced such figures as Trim, and my Uncle Toby, and Mr. Shandy. Jacques's master is a mere lay figure, and Jacques himself, with his monotonous catchword, "*Il était écrit là-haut*," has no real personality; he has none of the naturalness that wins us to Corporal Trim, still less has he any touch of the profound humour of the immortal Sancho. The book is a series of stories, rather than Sterne's subtle amalgam of pathos, gentle irony, and frank buffoonery; and the stories themselves are for the most part either insipid or obscene. There is perhaps one exception. The longest and the most elaborate of them, that which Schiller translated, is more like one of the modern French novels of a certain kind, than any other production of the eighteenth century. The adventure of Madame de Pommeraye and the

Marquis d'Arcis is a crude foreshadowing of a style that has been perfected by M. Feydeau and M. Flaubert. The Marquis has been the lover of Madame de Pommeraye; he grows weary of her, and in time the lady discovers the bitter truth. Resignation is not among her virtues, and in her rage and anguish she devises an elaborate plan of revenge, which she carries out with the utmost tenacity and resolution. It consists in leading him on, by skilful incitements, to marry a woman whom he supposes to be an angel of purity, but whom Madame de Pommeraye triumphantly reveals to him on the morning after his marriage as a creature whose past history has been one of notorious depravity. This disagreeable story, of which Balzac would have made a masterpiece, is told in an interesting way, and the humoristic machinery by which the narrative is managed is less tiresome than usual. It is at least a story with meaning, purpose, and character. It is neither a jumble without savour or point, nor is it rank and gross like half the pages in the book. "Your *Jacques*," Diderot supposes some one to say to him, "is only a tasteless rhapsody of facts, some real, others imaginary, written without grace, and distributed without order. How can a man of sense and conduct, who prides himself on his philosophy, find amusement in spinning out tales so obscene as these?"[17] And this is exactly what the modern critic is bound to ask. In Rabelais there is at least puissant laughter; in Montaigne, when he dwells on such matters, there is *naïveté*. In Diderot we do not even feel that he is having any enjoyment in his grossnesses; they have not even the bad excuse of seeming spontaneous and coming from the fulness of his heart. "Reader," he says, "I amuse myself in writing the follies that you commit; your follies make me laugh; and my book puts you out of humour. To speak frankly to you, I find that the more wicked of us two is not myself." Unhappily, he does not convey the impression of amusement to his readers; it has no infection in it, and if his book puts us out of humour, it is not by its satire on mankind, but by its

essential want of point and want of meaning, either moral or æsthetic. The few masters of this style have known how to bind the heterogeneous elements together, if not by some deep-lying purpose, at least by some pervading mood of rich and mellow feeling. In *Jacques le Fataliste* is neither.

That men of the stamp of Goethe and Schiller should have found such a book of delicious feast, naturally makes the disparaging critic pause. In truth, we can easily see how it was. Like all the rest of Diderot's work, it breaks roughly in upon that starved formalism which had for long lain so heavily both on art and life. Its hardihood, its very license, its contempt of conventions, its presentation of common people and coarse passions and rough lives, all made it a dissolvent of the thin, dry, and frigid rules which tyrannised over the world, and interposed between the artist or the thinker and the real existence of man on the earth. When we think of what European literature was, it ceases to be wonderful that Goethe should have been unable for six whole hours to tear himself away from a book that so few men to-day, save under some compulsion, could persuade themselves to read through. On great wholesome minds the grossness left no stain, and the interest of Diderot's singularities worked as a stimulus to a happier originality in men of more disciplined endowments. And let us add, of more poetic endowments. It is the lack of poetry in *Jacques* that makes its irony so heavy to us. We only willingly suffer those to take us down into the depths who can also raise us on the wings of a beautiful fancy. Even Rabelais has his poetic moments, as in the picture of Cupid self-disarmed before the industrious serenity of the Muses. A single lovely image, like Sterne's figure of the recording angel, reconciles us to many a miry page. But in *Jacques le Fataliste*, Diderot never raises his eye for an instant to the blue æther, his ear catches no harmony of awe, of hope, nor even of a noble despair. With a kind of clumsy jubilancy he holds us fast in the ways and

language of thick and clogged sense. The *fatrasie* of old France has its place in literature, but it can never be restored in ages when a host of moral anxieties have laid siege to men's souls. The uncommon is always welcome to the lover of art, but it must justify itself. *Jacques* has the quality of the uncommon; it is a curiously prepared dish, as Goethe said; but it lacks the pinch of salt and the handful of herbs with sharp diffusive flavour.

CHAPTER III. ART.



IN 1759 DIDEROT wrote for Grimm the first of his criticisms on the exhibition of paintings in the Salon. At the beginning of the reign of Lewis XV. these exhibitions took place every year, as they take place now. But from 1751 onwards, they were only held once in two years. Diderot has left his notes on every salon from 1759 to 1781, with the exception of that of 1773, when he was travelling in Holland and Russia.

We have already seen how Grimm made Diderot work for him. The nine *Salons* are one of the results of this willing bondage, and they are perhaps the only part of Diderot's works that has enjoyed a certain measure of general popularity. Mr. Carlyle describes them with emphatic enthusiasm: "What with their unrivalled clearness, painting the picture over again for us, so that we too *see* it, and can judge it; what with their sunny fervour, inventiveness, real artistic genius, which wants nothing but a *hand*, they are with some few exceptions in the German tongue, the only Pictorial Criticisms we know of worth reading."[18] I only love painting in poetry, Madame Necker said to Diderot, and it is into poetry that you have found out the secret of rendering the works of our modern painters, even the commonest of them. It would be a truly imperial luxury, wrote A. W. Schlegel, to get a collection of pictures described for oneself by Diderot.

There is a freshness, a vivacity, a zeal, a sincerity, a brightness of interest in his subject, which are perhaps unique in the whole history of criticism. He flings himself into the task with the perfection of natural abandonment to a joyous and delightful subject. His whole personality is engaged in a work that has all the air of being overflowing pleasure, and his pleasure is contagious. His criticism awakens the imagination of the reader. Not only do we see the picture; we hear Diderot's own voice in ecstasies of praise

and storms of boisterous wrath. There is such mass in his criticism; so little of the mincing and niggling of the small virtuoso. In facility of expression, in animation, in fecundity of mood, in fine improvisation, these pieces are truly incomparable. There is such an *impetus animi et quædam artis libido*. Some of the charm and freedom may be due to the important circumstance that he was not writing for the public. He was not exposed to the reaction of a large unknown audience upon style; hence the absence of all the stiffness of literary pose. But the positive conditions of such success lay in the resources of Diderot's own character.

The sceptic, the dogmatist, the dialectician, and the other personages of a heterogeneous philosophy who existed in Diderot's head, all disappear or fall back into a secondary place, and he surrenders himself with a curious freedom to such imaginative beauty as contemporary art provided for him. Diderot was perhaps the one writer of the time who was capable on occasion of rising above the strong prevailing spirit of the time; capable of forgetting for a season the passion of the great philosophical and ecclesiastical battle. No one save Diderot could have been moved by sight of a picture to such an avowal as this:

"Absurd rigorists do not know the effect of external ceremonies on the people; they can never have seen the enthusiasm of the multitude at the procession of the *Fête Dieu*, an enthusiasm that sometimes gains even me. I have never seen that long file of priests in their vestments; those young acolytes clad in their white robes, with broad blue sashes engirdling their waists, and casting flowers on the ground before the Holy Sacrament; the crowd as it goes before and follows after them hushed in religious silence, and so many with their faces bent reverently to the ground; I have never heard that grave and pathetic chant, as it is led by the priests and fervently responded to by an infinity of voices of men, of women, of girls, of little children, without my inmost heart being stirred, and tears coming into my

eyes. There is in it something, I know not what, that is grand, solemn, sombre, and mournful."

Thus to find the material of religious reaction in the author of *Jacques le Fataliste* and the centre of the atheistic group, completes the circle of Diderot's immense and deep-lying versatility. And in his account of such a mood, we see how he came to be so great and poetical a critic; we see the sincerity, the alertness, the profound mobility, with which he was open to impressions of colour, of sound, of the pathos of human aspiration, of the solemn concourses of men.

France has long been sovereign in criticism in its literary sense. In that department she has simply never had, and has not now, any serious rival. In the profounder historic criticism, Germany exhibits her one great, peculiar, and original gift. In the criticism of art Germany has at least three memorable names; but save where history is concerned most modern German æsthetics are so clouded with metaphysical speculation as to leave the obscurity of a very difficult subject as thick as it was before. In France the beginnings of art-criticism were literary rather than philosophic, and with the exception of Cousin's worthless eloquence, and of the writers whose philosophy Cousin dictated, and of M. Taine's ingenious paradoxes, Diderot is the only writer who has deliberately brought a vivid spirit and a philosophic judgment to the discussion of the forms of Beauty, as things worthy of real elucidation. As far back as the time of the English Restoration, Dufresnoy had written in bad Latin a poem on the art of Painting, which had the signal honour of being translated into good English by no less illustrious a master of English than Dryden, and it was again translated by Mason, the friend of Reynolds and of Gray. Imitations, applied to the pictorial art, of the immortal Epistle to the Pisos, came thick in France in the eighteenth century.[19] But these effusions are merely literary, and they are very bad literature indeed. The abbé Dubos published in 1719 a

volume of Critical Reflections on Poetry and Painting, including observations also on the relations of those arts to Music. Lessing is known to have made use of this work in his *Laocöon*, and Diderot gave it a place among the books which he recommended in his Plan of a University.[20] This, as it is the earliest, seems to have been the best contribution to æsthetic thought before Lessing and Diderot. Daniel Webb, the English friend of Raphael Mengs, published an Enquiry into the Beauties of Painting (1760), and Diderot wrote a notice of it,[21] but it appears to have made no mark on his mind. André, a Jesuit father, wrote an Essay on the Beautiful (1741), which distributed the kinds of art with precision, but omitted to say in what the Beautiful consists. The abbé Batteux wrote a volume reducing the fine arts to a single principle, and another volume attempting a systematic classification of them. The first of these was the occasion of Diderot's Letter on Deaf Mutes, and Diderot described their author as a good man of letters, but without taste, without criticism, and without philosophy; *à ces bagatelles près, le plus joli garçon du monde*.[22]

Travellers to the land where criticism of art has been so slight, and where production has been so noble, so bounteous, so superb, published the story of what Italy had shown to them. Madame de Pompadour designed to make her brother the Superintendent of fine arts, and she despatched Cochin, the great engraver of the day, to accompany him in a studious tour through the holy land of the arts. Cochin was away nearly two years, and on his return produced three little volumes (1758), in which he deals such blows to some vaunted immortalities as made the idolators by convention not a little angry. The abbé Richard (1766) published six very stupid volumes on Italy, and such criticism on art as they contain is not worthy of serious remark. The President de Brosses spent a year in Italy (1739-40), and wrote letters to his friends at home, which may be read to-day with interest and pleasure for their graphic picture of Italian society; but the criticisms which they

contain on the great works of art are those of a well-informed man of the world, taking many things for granted, rather than of a philosophical critic industriously using his own mind. His book recalls to us how true the eighteenth century was to itself in its hatred of Gothic architecture, that symbol and associate of mysticism, and of the age which the eighteenth century blindly abhorred as the source of all the tyrannical laws and cruel superstitions that still weighed so heavily on mankind. "You know the Palace of Saint Mark at Venice," says De Brosses: "*c'est un vilain monsieur, s'il eu fut jamais, massif, sombre, et gothique, du plus méchant goût*!"[23]

Dupaty, like De Brosses, an eminent lawyer, an acquaintance of Diderot and an early friend of a conspicuous figure of a later time, the ill-starred Vergniaud, travelled in Italy almost immediately before the Revolution (1785), and his letters, when read with those of De Brosses, are a curious illustration of the change that had come over the spirit of men in the interval. He leaves the pictures of the Pitti collection at Florence, and plunges into meditation in the famous gardens behind the palace, rejoicing with much expansion in the glories of light and air, in greenery and the notes of birds, and finally sums all up in one rapturous exclamation of the vast superiority of nature over art.[24]

It is impossible, in reading how deeply Diderot was affected by fifth-rate paintings and sculpture, not to count it among the great losses of literature that he saw few masterpieces. He never made the great pilgrimage. He was never at Venice, Florence, Parma, Rome. A journey to Italy was once planned, in which Grimm and Rousseau were to have been his travelling companions;[25] the project was not realised, and the strongest critic of art that his country produced never saw the greatest glories of art. If Diderot had visited Florence and Rome, even the mighty painter of the Last Judgment and the creator of those sublime figures in the New Sacristy at San Lorenzo, would have found an interpreter worthy of him. But it was not

to be. “It is rare,” he once wrote, “for an artist to excel without having seen Italy, just as a man seldom becomes a great writer or a man of great taste without having given severe study to the ancients.”[26] Diderot at least knew what he lost.

French art was then, as art usually is, the mirror of its time, reproducing such imaginative feeling as society could muster. When the Republic and the Empire came, and twenty years of battle and siege, then the art of the previous generation fell into a degree of contempt for which there is hardly a parallel. Pictures that had been the delight of the town and had brought fortunes to their painters, rotted on the quays or were sold for a few pence at low auctions. Fragonard, who had been the darling of his age, died in neglect and beggary. David and his hideous art of the Empire utterly effaced what had thrown the contemporaries of Diderot into rapture.[27] Every one knows all that can be said against the French paintings of Diderot’s time. They are executed hastily and at random; they abound in technical defects of colour, of drawing, of composition; their feeling is light and shallow. Watteau died in 1721 — at the same premature age as Raphael, — but he remained as the dominating spirit of French art through the eighteenth century. Of course the artists went to Rome, but they changed sky and not spirit. The pupils of the academy came back with their portfolios filled with sketches in which we see nothing of the “lone mother of dead empires,” nothing of the vast ruins and the great sombre desolate Campagna, but only Rome turned into a decoration for the scenes of a theatre or the panels of a boudoir. The Olympus of Homer and of Virgil, as has been well said, becomes the Olympus of Ovid. Strength, sublimity, even stateliness disappeared, unless we admit some of the first two qualities in the landscapes of Vernet. Not only is beauty replaced by prettiness, but by prettiness in season and out of season. The common incongruity of introducing a spirit of elegance and literature into the simplicities of the true

pastoral, was condemned by Diderot as a mixture of Fontenelle with Theocritus. We do not know what name he would have given to that still more curious incongruity of taste, which made a publisher adorn a treatise on Differential and Integral Calculus with amusing plates by Cochin, and introduce dainty little vignettes into a Demonstration of the Properties of the Cycloid.

There is one true story that curiously illustrates the spirit of French art in those equivocal days. When Madame de Pompadour made up her mind to play pander to the jaded appetites of the king, she had a famous female model of the day introduced into a *Holy Family*, which was destined for the private chapel of the queen. The portrait answered its purpose; it provoked the curiosity and desire of the king, and the model was invited to the Parc-aux-Cerfs.[28] This was typical of the service that painting was expected to render to the society that adored it and paid for it. "All is daintiness, delicate caressing for delicate senses, even down to the external decoration of life, down to the sinuous lines, the wanton apparel, the refined commodity of rooms and furniture. In such a place and in such company, it is enough to be together to feel at ease. Their idleness does not weigh upon them; life is their plaything."[29]

Only let us not, while reserving our serious admiration for Titian, Rembrandt, Raphael, and the rest of the gods and demigods, refuse at least a measure of historic tolerance to these light and graceful creations. Boucher, whose dreams of rose and blue were the delight of his age, came away from Rome saying: "Raphael is a woman, Michael Angelo is a monster; one is paradise, the other is hell; they are painters of another world; it is a dead language that nobody speaks in our day. We others are the painters of our own age: we have not common sense, but we are charming." This account of them was not untrue. They filled up the space between the grandiose pomp of Le Brun and the sombre pseudo-antique of David, just as the

incomparable grace and sparkle of Voltaire's lighter verse filled up the space in literature between Racine and Chénier. They have a poetry of their own; they are cheerful, sportive, full of fancy, and like everything else of that day, intensely sociable. They are, at any rate, even the most sportive of them, far less unwholesome and degrading than the acres of martyrdoms, emaciations, bad crucifixions, bad pietas, that make some galleries more disgusting than a lazar-house.[30]

For Watteau himself, the deity of the century, Diderot cared very little. "I would give ten Watteaus," he said, "for one Teniers." This was as much to be expected, as it was characteristic in Lewis XIV., when some of Teniers's pictures were submitted to him, imperiously to command "*ces magots là*" to be taken out of his sight.

Greuze (*b. 1725, d. 1805*) of all the painters of the time was Diderot's chief favourite. Diderot was not at all blind to Greuze's faults, to his repetitions, his frequent want of size and amplitude, the excess of gray and of violet in his colouring. But all these were forgotten in transports of sympathy for the sentiment. As we glance at a list of Greuze's subjects, we perceive that we are in the very heart of the region of the domestic, the moral, "*l'honnête*," the homely pathos of the common people. The Death of a father of a family, regretted by his children; The Death of an unnatural father, abandoned by his children; The beloved mother caressed by her little ones; A child weeping over its dead bird; A Paralytic tended by his family, or the Fruit of a Good Education: — Diderot was ravished by such themes. The last picture he describes as a proof that compositions of that kind are capable of doing honour to the gifts and the sentiments of the artist.[31] The *Girl bewailing her dead bird* throws him into raptures. "O, the pretty elegy!" he begins, "the charming poem! the lovely idyll!" and so forth, until at length he breaks into a burst of lyric condolence addressed to the weeping child, that would fill four or five of these pages.[32]

No picture of the eighteenth century was greeted with more enthusiasm than Greuze's *Accordée de Village*, which was exhibited in 1761. It seems to tell a story, and therefore even to-day, in spite of its dulled pink and lustreless blue, it arrests the visitor to one of the less frequented halls of the Louvre.[33] Paris, weary of mythology and sated with pretty indecencies, was fascinated by the simplicity of Greuze's village tale. "*On se sent gagner d'une émotion douce en le regardant*," said Diderot, and this gentle emotion was dear to the cultivated classes in France at that moment of the century. It was the year of the *New Heloïsa*.

The subject is of the simplest: a peasant paying the dower-money of his daughter. "The father" — it is prudent of us to borrow Diderot's description — "is seated in the great chair of the house. Before him his son-in-law standing, and holding in his left hand the bag that contains the money. The betrothed, standing also, with one arm gently passed under the arm of her lover, the other grasped by her mother, who is seated. Between the mother and the bride, a younger sister standing, leaning on the bride and with an arm thrown round her shoulders. Behind this group, a child standing on tiptoes to see what is going on. To the extreme left in the background, and at a distance from the scene, two women-servants who are looking on. To the right a cupboard with its usual contents — all scrupulously clean.... A wooden staircase leading to the upper floor. In the foreground near the feet of the mother, a hen leading her young ones, to whom a little girl throws crumbs of bread; a basin full of water, and on the edge of it, one of the small chickens with its beak up in the air so as to let the water go down." Diderot then proceeds to criticise the details, telling us the very words that he hears the father addressing to the bridegroom, and as a touch of observation of nature, that while one of the old man's hands, of which we see the back, is tanned and brown, the other, of which we see the palm, is white. "To the bride the painter has given a face full of charm, of

seemliness, of reserve. She is dressed to perfection. That apron of white stuff could not be better; there is a trifle of luxury in her ornament; but then it is a wedding-day. You should note how true are the folds and creases in her dress, and in those of the rest. The charming girl is not quite straight; but there is a light and gentle inflexion in all her figure and her limbs that fills her with grace and truth. Indeed she is pretty and very pretty. If she had leaned more towards her lover, it would have been unbecoming; more to her mother and her father, and she would have been false. She has her arm half passed under that of her future husband, and the tips of her fingers rest softly on his hand; that is the only mark of tenderness that she gives him, and perhaps without knowing it herself: it is a delicate idea in the painter."[34]

"Courage, my good Greuze," he cries, "*fais de la morale en peinture*. What, has not the pencil been long enough and too long consecrated to debauchery and vice? Ought we not to be delighted at seeing it at last unite with dramatic poetry in instructing us, correcting us, inviting us to virtue?"[35] It has been sometimes said that Diderot would have exulted in the paintings of Hogarth, and we may admit that he would have sympathised with the spirit of such moralities as the Idle and the Industrious Apprentice, the Rake's Progress, and Mariage à la Mode. The intensity and power of that terrible genius would have had their attraction, but the minute ferocities of Hogarth's ruthless irony would certainly have revolted him. Such a scene as Lord Squanderfield's visit to the quack doctor, or as the Rake's debauch, would have filled him with inextinguishable horror. He could never have forgiven an artist who, in the ghastly pathos of a little child straining from the arms of its nurse towards the mother, as she lies in the very article of death, could still find in his heart to paint on it the dark patches of foul disease. He would have fled with shrieks from those appalling scenes of murder, torture, madness, bestial drunkenness, rapacity, fury — from that delirium of scrofula, palsy, entrails, the winding-sheet, and the grave-worm.

Diderot's method was to improve men, not by making their blood curdle, but by warming and softening the domestic affections.

Diderot, as a critic, seems always to have remembered a pleasant remonstrance once addressed at the Salon by the worthy Chardin to himself and Grimm: "Gently, good sirs, gently! Out of all the pictures that are here seek the very worst; and know that two thousand unhappy wretches have bitten their brushes in two with their teeth, in despair of ever doing even as badly. Parrocel, whom you call a dauber, and who for that matter is a dauber, if you compare him to Vernet, is still a man of rare talent relatively to the multitude of those who have flung up the career in which they started with him." And then the artist recounts the immense labours, the exhausting years, the boundless patience, attention, tenacity, that are the conditions even of a mediocre degree of mastery. We are reminded of the scene in a famous work of art in our own day, where Herr Klesmer begs Miss Gwendolen Harleth to reflect, how merely to stand or to move on the stage is an art that requires long practice. "*O le triste et plat métier que celui de critique!*" Diderot cries on one occasion: "*Il est si difficile de produire une chose même médiocre; il est si facile de sentir la médiocrité.*"[36] No doubt, as experience and responsibility gather upon us, we learn how hard in every line is even moderate skill. The wise are perhaps content to find what a man can do, without making it a reproach to him that there is something else which he cannot do.

But Diderot knew well enough that Chardin's kindly principle might easily be carried too far. In general, he said, criticism displeases me; it supposes so little talent. "What a foolish occupation, that of incessantly hindering ourselves from taking pleasure, or else making ourselves blush for the pleasure that we have taken! And that is the occupation of criticism!"[37] Yet in one case he writes a score of pages of critical dialogue, in which the chief interlocutor is a painter who avenges his own failure by

stringent attacks on the work of happier rivals of the year. And speaking in his own proper person, Diderot knows how to dismiss incompetence with the right word, sometimes of scorn, more often of good-natured remonstrance. Bad painters, a Parrocel, a Brenet, fare as ill at his hands as they deserved to do. He remarks incidentally that the condition of the bad painter and the bad actor is worse than that of the bad man of letters: the painter hears with his own ears the expressions of contempt for his talent, and the hisses of the audience go straight to the ears of the actor, whereas the author has the comfort of going to his grave without a suspicion that you have cried out at every page: "*The fool, the animal, the jackass!*" and have at length flung his book into a corner. There is nothing to prevent the worst author, as he sits alone in his library, and reads himself over and over again, from congratulating himself on being the originator of a host of rare and felicitous ideas.[38]

The one painter whom Diderot never spares is Boucher, who was an idol of the time, and made an income of fifty thousand livres a year out of his popularity. He laughs at him as a mere painter of fans, an artist with no colours on his palette save white and red. He admits the fecundity, the *fougue*, the ease of Boucher, just as Sir Joshua Reynolds admits his grace and beauty and good skill in composition.[39] Boucher, says Diderot, is in painting what Ariosto is in poetry, and he who admires the one is inconsistent if he is not mad for the other. What is wanting is disciplined taste, more variety, more severity. Yet he cannot refuse to concede about one of Boucher's pictures that after all he would be glad to possess it. Every time you saw it, he says, you would find fault with it, yet you would go on looking at it.[40] This is perhaps what the severest modern amateur, as he strolls carelessly through the French school at his leisure, would not in his heart care to deny.

Fragonard, whose picture of Coresus and Callirrhoë made a great sensation in its day, and still attracts some small share of attention in the French school, was not a favourite with Diderot. The Callirrhoë inspired an elaborate but not very felicitous criticism. Then the painter changed his style in the direction of Boucher, and as far away as possible from *l'honnête* and *le beau moral*, and Diderot turned away from him; at last describing an oval picture representing groups of children in heaven as "*une belle et grande omelette d'enfants*," heads, legs, thighs, arms, bodies, all interlaced together among yellowish clouds— "*bien omelette, bein douillette, bein jaune, et bien brûlée*."[41]

On the whole, we cannot wonder either that painters hold literary talk about their difficult and complex art so cheap, or that the lay public prizes it so much above its intrinsic worth. It helps the sluggish imagination and dull sight of the one, while it is apt to pass ignorantly over both the true difficulties and the true successes of the other. Diderot, unlike most of those who have come after him, had carefully studied the conditions prescribed to the painter by the material in which he works. Although he was a master of the literary criticism of art, he had artists among his intimate companions, and was too eager for knowledge not to wring from them the secrets of technique, just as he extorted from weavers and dyers the secrets of their processes and instruments. He makes no ostentatious display of this special knowledge, yet it is present, giving a firmness and accuracy to what would otherwise be too like mere arbitrary lyrics suggested by a painting, and not really dealing with it. His special gift was the transformation of scientific criticism into something with the charm of literature. Take, for instance, a picture by Vien:

"*Psyche approaching with her lamp to surprise Love in his sleep.* — The two figures are of flesh and blood, but they have neither the elegance, nor the grace, nor the delicacy that the subject required. Love seems to me to be

making a grimace. Psyche is not like a woman who comes trembling on tiptoe. I do not see on her face that mixture of surprise, fear, love, desire, and admiration, which ought all to be there. It is not enough to show in Psyche a curiosity to see Love; I must also perceive in her the fear of awakening him. She ought to have her mouth half open, and to be afraid of drawing her breath. 'Tis her lover that she sees — that she sees for the first time, at the risk of losing him for ever. What joy to look upon him, and to find him so fair! Oh, what little intelligence in our painters, how little they understand nature! The head of Psyche ought to be inclined towards Love; the rest of her body drawn back, as it is when you advance towards a spot where you fear to enter, and from which you are ready to flee back; one foot planted on the ground and the other barely touching it. And the lamp; ought she to let the light fall on the eyes of Love? Ought she not to hold it apart, and to shield it with her hand to deaden its brightness? Moreover, that would have lighted the picture in a striking way. These good people do not know that the eyelids have a kind of transparency; they have never seen a mother coming in the night to look at her child in the cradle, with a lamp in her hand, and fearful of awakening it."[42]

There have been many attempts to imitate this manner since Diderot. No less a person than M. Thiers tried it, when it fell to him as a young writer for the newspapers to describe the Salon of 1822. One brilliant poet, novelist, traveller, critic, has succeeded, and Diderot's art-criticism is at least equalled in Théophile Gautier's pages on Titian's Assunta and Bellini's Madonna at Venice, or Murillo's Saint Anthony of Padua at Seville.[43]

Just as in his articles in the Encyclopædia, here too Diderot is always ready to turn from his subject for a moral aside. Even the modern reader will forgive the discursive apostrophe addressed to the judges of the unfortunate Calas, the almost lyric denunciation of an atrocity that struck

such deep dismay into the hearts of all the brethren of the Encyclopædia.[44] But Diderot's asides are usually in less tragic matter. A picture of Michael Van Loo's reminds him that Van Loo had once a friend in Spain. This friend took it into his head to equip a vessel for a trading expedition, and Van Loo invested all his fortune in his friend's vessel. The vessel was wrecked, the fortune was lost, and the master was drowned. When Van Loo heard of the disaster, the first word that came to his mouth was — *I have lost a good friend*. And on this Diderot sails off into a digression on the grounds of praise and blame.

Here are one or two illustrations of the same moralising:

"The effect of our sadness on others is very singular. Have you not sometimes noticed in the country the sudden stillness of the birds, if it happens that on a fine day a cloud comes and lingers over the spot that was resounding with their music? A suit of deep mourning in company is the cloud that, as it passes, causes the momentary silence of the birds. It goes, and the song is resumed."

"We should divide a nation into three classes: the bulk of the nation, which forms the national taste and manners; those who rise above these are called madmen, originals, oddities; those who fall below are noodles. The progress of the human mind causes the level to shift, and a man often lives too long for his reputation.... He who is too far in front of his generation, who rises above the general level of the common manners, must expect few votes; he ought to be thankful for the oblivion that rescues him from persecution. Those who raise themselves to a great distance above the common level are not perceived; they die forgotten and tranquil, either like everybody else, or far away from everybody else. That is my motto."[45]

"But Vernet will never be more than Vernet, a mere man. No, and for that very reason all the more astonishing, and his work all the more worthy of admiration. It is, no doubt, a great thing, is this universe; but when I

compare it with the energy of the productive cause, if I had to wonder at aught, it would be that its work is not still finer and still more perfect. It is just the reverse when I think of the weakness of man, of his poor means, of the embarrassments and of the short duration of his life, and then of certain things that he has undertaken and carried out."[46]

These digressions are one source of the charm of Diderot's criticism. They impart ease and naturalness to it, because they evidently reproduce the free movement of his mind as it really was, and not as the supposed dignity of authorship might require him to pretend. There is no stiffness nor sense, as we have said, of literary strain, and yet there is no disturbing excess of what is random, broken, *décousu*. The digression flows with lively continuity from the main stream and back again into it, leaving some cheerful impression or curious suggestion behind it. Something, we cannot tell what, draws him off to wonder whether there is not as much verve in the first scene of Terence and in the Antinoüs as in any scene of Molière or any work of Michael Angelo? "I once answered this question, but rather too lightly. Every moment I am apt to make a mistake, because language does not furnish me with the right expression for the truth at the moment. I abandon a thesis for lack of words that shall supply my reasons. I have one thing in the bottom of my heart, and I find myself saying another. There is the advantage of living in retirement and solitude. There a man speaks, asks himself questions, listens to himself, and listens in silence. His secret sensation develops itself little by little." Then when he is about to speak of one of Greuze's pictures, he bethinks himself of Greuze's vanity, and this leads him to a vein of reflection which it is good for all critics, whether public or private, to hold fast in their minds. "If you take away Greuze's vanity, you will take away his verve, you will extinguish his fire, his genius will undergo an eclipse. *Nos qualités tiennent de prés à nos défauts*." And

of this important truth, the base of wise tolerance, there follow a dozen graphic examples.[47]

Grétry, the composer, more than once consulted Diderot in moments of perplexity. It was not always safe, he says, to listen to the glowing man when he allowed his imagination to run away with him, but the first burst was of inspiration divine.[48] Painters found his suggestions as potent and as hopeful as the musician found them. He delighted in being able to tell an artist how he might change his bad picture into a good one.[49] "Chardin, La Grenée, Greuze, and others," says Diderot, "have assured me (and artists are not given to flattering men of letters) that I was about the only one whose images could pass at once to canvas, almost exactly as they came into my head." And he gives illustrations, how he instantly furnished to La Grenée a subject for a picture of Peace; to Greuze, a design introducing a nude figure without wounding the modesty of the spectator; to a third, a historical subject.[50] The first of the three is a curious example of the difficulty which even a strong genius like Diderot had in freeing himself from artificial traditions. For Peace, he cried to La Grenée, show me Mars with his breastplate, his sword girded on, his head noble and firm. Place standing by his side a Venus, full, divine, voluptuous, smiling on him with an enchanting smile; let her point to his casque, in which her doves have made their nest. Is it not singular that even Diderot sometimes failed to remember that Mars and Venus are dead, that they can never be the source of a fresh and natural inspiration, and that neither artist nor spectator can be moved by cold and vapid allegories in an extinct dialect? If Diderot could have seen such a treatment of La Grenée's subject as Landseer's *Peace*, with its children playing at the mouth of the slumbering gun, he would have been the first to cry out how much nearer this came to the spirit of his own æsthetic methods, than all the pride of Mars and all the beauty of Venus. He is truer to himself in the subject with which he met Greuze's perplexity in

the second of his two illustrations. He bade Greuze paint the Honest Model; a girl sitting to an artist for the first time, her poor garments on the ground beside her; her head resting on one of her hands, and a tear rolling down each cheek. The mother, whose dress betrays the extremity of indigence, is by her side, and with her own hands and one of the hands of her daughter covers her face. The painter, witness of the scene, softened and touched, lets his palette or his brush fall from his hand. Greuze at once exclaimed that he saw his subject; and we may at least admit that this pretty bit of commonplace sentimentalism is more in Diderot's vein than pagan gods and goddesses.

Diderot is never more truly himself than when he takes the subject of a picture that is before him, and shows how it might have been more effectively handled. Thus:

"The Flight into Egypt is treated in a fresh and piquant manner. But the painter has not known how to make the best of his idea. The Virgin passes in the background of the picture, bearing the infant Jesus in her arms. She is followed by Joseph and the ass carrying the baggage. In the foreground are the shepherds prostrating themselves, their hands upturned towards her, and wishing her a happy journey. Ah, what a fine painting, if the artist had known how to make mountains at the foot of which the Virgin had passed; if he had known how to make the mountains very steep, escarped, majestic; if he had covered them with moss and wild shrubs; if he had given to the Virgin simplicity, beauty, grandeur, nobleness; if the road that she follows had led into the paths of some forest, lonely and remote; if he had taken his moment at the rise of day, or at its fall!"[51]

The picture of Saint Benedict by Deshays — whom at one moment Diderot pronounces to be the first painter in the nation — stirs the same spirit of emendation. Diderot thinks that in spite of the pallor of the dying saint's visage, one would be inclined to give him some years yet to live.

"I ask whether it would not have been better that his legs should have sunk under him; that he should have been supported by two or three monks; that he should have had the arms extended, the head thrown back, with death on his lips and ecstasy on his brow. If the painter had given this strong expression to his Saint Benedict, consider, my friend, how it would have reflected itself on all the rest of the picture. That slight change in the principal figure would have influenced all the others. The celebrant, instead of being upright, would in his compassion have leaned more forward; distress and anguish would have been more strongly depicted in all the bystanders. There is a piece from which you could teach young students that, by altering one single circumstance, you alter all others, or else the truth disappears. You could make out of it an excellent chapter on the *force of unity*: you would have to preserve the same arrangement, the same figures, and to invite them to execute the picture according to the different changes that were made in the figure of the communicant."[52]

The admirable Salons were not Diderot's only contributions to æsthetic criticism. He could not content himself with reproductions, in eloquent language upon paper, of the combinations of colour and form upon canvas. No one was further removed from vague or indolent expansion. He returns again and again to examine with keenness and severity the principles, the methods, the distinctions of the fine arts, and though he is often a sentimentalist and a declaimer, he can also, when the time comes, transform himself into an accurate scrutiniser of ideas and phrases, a seeker after causes and differences, a discoverer of kinds and classes in art, and of the conditions proper to success in each of them. In short, the fact of being an eloquent and enthusiastic critic of pictures, did not prevent him from being a truly philosophical thinker about the abstract laws of art, with the thinker's genius for analysis, comparison, classification. Who that has read them can ever forget the dialogues that are set among the landscapes of

Vernet in the Salons of 1767?[53] The critic supposes himself unable to visit the Salon of the year, and to be staying in a gay country-house amid some fine landscapes on the sea-coast. He describes his walks among these admirable scenes, and the strange and varying effects of light and colour, and all the movements of the sky and ocean; and into the descriptions he weaves a series of dialogues with an abbé, a tutor of the children of the house, upon art and landscape and the processes of the universe. Nothing can be more excellent and lifelike: it is not until the end that he lets the secret slip that the whole fabric has been a flight of fancy, inspired by no real landscape, but by the sea-pieces sent to the exhibition by Vernet.

This is an illustration of the variety of approach which makes Diderot so interesting, so refreshing a critic. He never sinks into what is mechanical, and the evidence of this is that his mind, while intent on the qualities of a given picture, yet moves freely to the outside of the picture, and is ever cordially open to the most general thoughts and moods, while attending with workmanlike fidelity to what is particular in the object before him.[54]

In the light of modern speculation upon the philosophy of the fine arts, Diderot makes no commanding figure, because he is so egregiously unsystematic. But as Goethe said, in a piece where he was withstanding Diderot to the face, *die höchste Wirkung des Geistes ist, den Geist hervorzurufen* — the highest influence of mind is to call out mind. This stimulating provocation of the intelligence was the master faculty in Diderot. For the sake of that men are ready to pardon all excesses, and to overlook many offences against the law of Measure. From such a point of view, Goethe's treatment of Diderot's Essay on Painting (written in 1765, but not given to the world until 1796) is an instructive lesson. "Diderot's essay," he wrote to Schiller, "is a magnificent work, and it speaks even more usefully to the poet than to the painter, though for the painter, too, it is a torch of powerful illumination." Yet Diderot's critical principle in the

essay was exactly opposite to Goethe's; and when Goethe translated some portions of it, he was forced to add a commentary of stringent protest. Diderot, as usual, energetically extols nature, as the one source and fountain of true artistic inspiration. Even in what looks to us like defect and monstrosity, she is never incorrect. If she inflicts on the individual some unusual feature, she never fails to draw other parts of the system into co-ordination and a sort of harmony with the abnormal element. We say of a man who passes in the street that he is ill-shapen. Yes, according to our poor rules; but according to nature, it is another matter. We say of a statue that it is of fine proportions. Yes, according to our poor rules; but according to nature?[55]

In the same vein, he breaks out against the practice of drawing from the academic model. All these academic positions, affected, constrained, artificial, as they are; all these actions coldly and awkwardly expressed by some poor devil, and always the same poor devil, hired to come three times a week, to undress himself, and to play the puppet in the hands of the professor — what have these in common with the positions and actions of nature? What is there in common between the man who draws water from the well in your courtyard, and the man who pretends to imitate him on the platform of the drawing-school? If Diderot thought the seven years passed in drawing the model no better than wasted, he was not any more indulgent to the practice of studying the minutiæ of the anatomy of the human frame. He saw the risk of the artist becoming vain of his scientific acquirement, of his eye being corrupted, of his seeking to represent what is under the surface, of his forgetting that he has only the exterior to show. A practice that is intended to make the student look at nature most commonly tends to make him see nature other than she really is. To sum up, mannerism would disappear from drawing and from colour, if people would only scrupulously

imitate nature. Mannerism comes from the masters, from the academy, from the school, and even from the antique.[56]

We may easily believe how many fallacies were discerned in such lessons as these by the author of *Iphigenie*, and the passionate admirer of the ancient marbles. Diderot's fundamental error, said Goethe, is to confound nature and art, completely to amalgamate nature with art. "Now Nature organises a living, an indifferent being, the Artist something dead, but full of significance; Nature something real, the Artist something apparent. In the works of Nature the spectator must import significance, thought, effect, reality; in a work of Art he will and must find this already there. A perfect imitation of Nature is in no sense possible; the Artist is only called to the representation of the surface of an appearance. The outside of the vessel, the living whole that speaks to all our faculties of mind and sense, that stirs our desire, elevates our intelligence — that whose possession makes us happy, the vivid, potent, finished Beautiful — for all this is the Artist appointed." In other words, art has its own laws, as it has its own aims, and these are not the laws and aims of nature. To mock at rules is to overthrow the conditions that make a painting or a statue possible. To send the pupil away from the model to the life of the street, the gaol, the church, is to send him forth without teaching him for what to look. To make light of the study of anatomy in art, is like allowing the composer to forget thorough bass in his enthusiasm, or the poet in his enthusiasm to forget the number of syllables in his verse. Again, though art may profit by a free and broad method, yet all artistic significance depends on the More and the Less. Beauty is a narrow circle in which one may only move in modest measure. And of this modest measure the academy, the school, the master, above all the antique, are the guardians and the teachers.[57]

It is unnecessary to labour the opposition between the two great masters of criticism. Goethe, as usual, must be pronounced to have the last word of

reason and wisdom, the word which comprehends most of the truth of the matter. And it is delivered in that generous and loyal spirit which nobody would have appreciated more than the free-hearted Diderot himself. The drift of Goethe's contention is, in fact, the thesis of Diderot's Paradox on the Comedian. But the state of painting in France — and Goethe admits it — may have called for a line of criticism which was an exaggeration of what Diderot, if he had been in Goethe's neutral position, would have found in his better mind.[58]

There is a passage in one of the Salons which sheds a striking side-light on the difference between these two great types of genius. The difference between the mere virtuoso and the deep critic is that, in the latter, behind views on art we discern far-reaching thoughts on life. And in Diderot, no less than in Goethe, art is ever seen in its associations with character, aspiration, happiness, and conduct.

"The sun, which was on the edge of the horizon, disappeared; over the sea there came all at once an aspect more sombre and solemn. Twilight, which is at first neither day nor night — an image of our feeble thoughts, and an image that warns the philosopher to stay in his speculations — warns the traveller too to turn his steps towards home. So I turned back, and as I continued the thread of my thoughts, I began to reflect that if there is a particular morality belonging to each species, so perhaps in the same species there is a different morality for different individuals, or at least for different kinds and collections of individuals. And in order not to scandalise you by too serious an example, it came into my head that there is perhaps a morality peculiar to artists or to art, and that this morality might well be the very reverse of the common morality. Yes, my friend, I am much afraid that man marches straight to misery by the very path that leads the imitator of nature to the sublime. To plunge into extremes — that is the rule for poets. To keep in all things the just mean — there is the rule for happiness. One

must not make poetry in real life. The heroes, the romantic lovers, the great patriots, the inflexible magistrates, the apostles of religion, the philosophers *à toute outrance* — all these rare and divine insensates make poetry in their life, and that is their bane. It is they who after death provide material for great pictures. They are excellent to paint. Experience shows that nature condemns to misery the man to whom she has allotted genius, and whom she has endowed with beauty; it is they who are the figures of poetry. Then within myself I lauded the mediocrity that shelters one alike from praise and blame; and yet why, I asked myself, would no one choose to let his sensibility go, and to become mediocre? O vanity of man!'[59]

Goethe's *Tasso*, a work so full of finished poetry and of charm, is the idealised and pathetic version of the figure that Diderot has thus conceived for genius. The dialogues between the hapless poet and Antonio, the man of the world, are a skilful, lofty, and impressive statement of the problem that often vexed Diderot. Goethe sympathised with Antonio's point of view; he had in his nature so much of the spirit of conduct, of saneness, of the common reason of the world. And in art he was a lover of calm ideals. In Diderot, as our readers by this time know, these things were otherwise.

The essay on Beauty in the Encyclopædia is less fertile than most of Diderot's contributions to the subject.[60] It contains a careful account of two or three other theories, especially that of Hutcheson. The object is to explain the source of Beauty. Diderot's own conclusion is that this is to be found in "relations." Our words for the different shades of the beautiful are expressive of notions (acquired by experience through the senses) of order, proportion, symmetry, unity, and so forth. But, after all, the real question remains unanswered — what makes some relations beautiful, and others not so; and the same objects beautiful to me, and indifferent to you; and the same object beautiful to me to-day, and indifferent or disgusting to me to-morrow? Diderot does, it is true, enumerate twelve sources of such diversity

of judgment, in different races, ages, individuals, moods, but their force depends upon the importation into the conception of beauty of some more definite element than the bare idea of relation. Some sentences show that he came very near to the famous theory of Alison, that beauty is only attributed to sounds and sights, where, and because, they recall what is pleasing, sublime, pathetic, and set our ideas and emotions flowing in one of these channels. But he does not get fairly on the track of either Alison's or any other decisive and marking adjective, with which to qualify his *rapports*. He wastes some time, moreover, in trying to bring within the four corners of his definition some uses of the terms of beauty, which are really only applied to objects by way of analogy, and are not meant to predicate the beautiful in any literal or scientific sense.

There is no more interesting department of æsthetic inquiry than the relations of the arts to one another, and the nature of the delimitations of the provinces of poetry, painting, sculpture, music. Diderot, from the very beginning of his career, had turned his thoughts to this intricate subject. In his letter on Deaf Mutes (1751) he had stated the problem — to collect the common beauties of poetry, painting, and music; to show their analogies; to explain how the poet, the painter, and the musician render the same image; to seize the fugitive emblems of their expression. Why should a situation that is admirable in a poem become ridiculous in a painting?[61] For instance, what is it that prevents a painter from reproducing the moment when Neptune raises his head above the tossing waters, as he is represented in Virgil:

Interea magno misceri murmure pontum. Emissamque hiemem sensit Neptunus, et imis Stagna refusa vadis; graviter commotus, et alto Prospiciens, summâ placidum caput extulit undâ.

Diderot's answer to the question is an anticipation of the main position of the famous little book which appeared fifteen years afterwards, and

which has been well described as the Organum of æsthetic cultivation. In *Laocoön* Lessing contends against Spence, the author of *Polymetis* against Caylus, and others of his contemporaries, that poetry and painting are divided from one another in aim, in effects, in reach, by the limits set upon each by the nature of its own material.[62] So Diderot says that the painter could not seize the Virgilian moment, because a body that is partially immersed in water is disfigured by an effect of refraction, which a faithful painter would be bound to reproduce; because the image of the body could not be seen transparently through the stormy waters, and therefore the god would have the appearance of being decapitated; because it is indispensable, if you would avoid the impression of a surgical amputation, that some visible portion of hidden limbs should be there to inform us of the existence of the rest.[63] He takes another instance, where a description that is admirable in poetry would be insupportable in painting. Who, he asks, could bear upon canvas the sight of Polyphemus grinding between his teeth the bones of one of the companions of Ulysses? Who could see without horror a giant holding a man in his enormous mouth, with blood dripping over his head and breast?

Among the many passages in which Diderot touches on the differences between poetry and painting, none is more just and true than that in which he implores the poet not to attempt description of details: “True taste fastens on one or two characteristics, and leaves the rest to imagination. ’Tis when Armida advances with noble mien in the midst of the ranks of the army of Godfrey, and when the generals begin to look at one another with jealous eyes, that Armida is beautiful to us. It is when Helen passes before the old men of Troy, and they all cry out — it is then that Helen is beautiful. And it is when Ariosto describes Alcina from the crown of her head to the soles of her feet, that notwithstanding the grace, the facility, the soft elegance of his verse, Alcina is not beautiful. He shows me everything; he leaves me

nothing to do; he makes me wearied and impatient. If a figure walks, describe to me its carriage and its lightness; I will undertake the rest. If it is stooping, speak to me only of arms and shoulders; I will take all else on myself. If you do more, you confuse the kinds of work; you cease to be a poet, and become a painter or sculptor. One single trait, a great trait; leave the rest to my imagination. That is true taste, great taste."[64] And then he quotes with admiration Ovid's line of the goddess of the seas:

Nec brachia longo Margine terrarum porrexerat Amphitrite.

Quel image! Quels bras! Quel prodigieux mouvement! Quelle figure! and so forth, after Diderot's manner.

Nobody will compare these detached and fragmentary deliverances with the full and easy mastery which Lessing, in *Laocöon* and its unfinished supplements, exhibits over the many ramifications of his central idea. We can only notice that Diderot had a foot on the track along which Lessing afterwards made such signal progress. The reader who cares to measure the advantage of Lessing's more serious and concentrated attention to his subject, may compare the twelfth chapter of *Laocöon* with Diderot's criticism on Doyen's painting of the Battle between Diomede and Aeneas.[65] As we see how near Diderot came to the real and decisive truths of all these matters, and yet how far he remains from the full perception of what a little consecutive study must have revealed to his superior genius, we can only think painfully of his avowal— "I have not the consciousness of having employed the half of my strength: *jusqu'à présent je n'ai que baguenaudé*."

On the great art of music Diderot has said little that is worth attending to. Bemetzrieder, a German musician, who taught Diderot's daughter to play on the clavecin, wrote an elementary book called Lessons on the Clavecin and Principles of Harmony. This is pronounced by the modern teachers to be not less than contemptible. Diderot, however, with his usual boundless good nature, took the trouble to set the book in a series of dialogues, in

which teacher, pupil, and a philosopher deal in all kinds of elaborate amenities, and pay one another many compliments. It reminds one of the old Hebrew grammar which is couched in the form of Conversations with a Duchess— "Your Grace having kindly condescended to approve of the plan that I have sketched. All this your Grace probably knows already, but your Grace has probably never attempted," and so forth.

The unwise things that men of letters have written from a good-natured wish to help their friends, are not so numerous that we need be afraid of extending to them a good-natured pardon. The beauty of Diderot's Salons is remarkable enough to cover a multitude of sins in other arts. There are few other compositions in European literature which show so well how criticism of art itself may become a fine art.

CHAPTER IV. ST. PETERSBURG AND THE HAGUE.



"WHAT WOULD YOU say of the owner of an immense palace, who should spend all his life in going up from the cellars to the attics, and going down from attics to cellar, instead of sitting quietly in the midst of his family? That is the image of the traveller." Yet Diderot, whose words these are, resolved at the age of sixty to undertake no less formidable a journey than to the remote capital on the shores of the Neva. It had come into his head, or perhaps others had put it into his head, that he owed a visit to his imperial benefactress whose bounty had rendered life easier to him. He had recently made the acquaintance of two Russian personages of consideration. One of them was the Princess Dashkow, who was believed to have taken a prominent part in that confused conspiracy of 1762, which ended in the murder of Peter III. by Alexis Orloff, and the elevation of Catherine II. to the throne. Her services at that critical moment had not prevented her disgrace, if indeed they were not its cause, and in 1770 the Princess set out on her travels. Horace Walpole has described the curiosity of the London world to see the Muscovite Alecto, the accomplice of the northern Athaliah, the amazon who had taken part in a revolution when she was only nineteen. In England she made a pleasant impression, in spite of eyes of "a very Catiline fierceness." She was equally delighted with England, and when she went on from London to Paris, she took very little trouble to make friends in the capital of the rival nation. Diderot seems to have been her only intimate. The Princess (1770) called nearly every afternoon at his door, carried him off to dinner, and kept him talking and declaiming until the early hours of the next morning. The "hurricanes of his enthusiastic nature" delighted her, and she remembered for years afterwards how on one occasion she excited him to such a pitch that he sprang from his chair as if

by machinery, strode rapidly up and down the room, and spat upon the floor with passion.[66]

The Prince Galitzin was a Russian friend of greater importance. Prince Galitzin was one of those foreigners, like Holbach, Grimm, Galiani, who found themselves more at home in Paris than anywhere else in the world. Living mostly among artists and men of letters, he became an established favourite. With Diderot's assistance (1767) he acquired for the Empress many of the pictures that adorn the great gallery at St. Petersburg, and Diderot praises his knowledge of the fine arts, the reason being that he has that great principle of true taste, the *belle âme*.[67] He wrote eclogues in French, and he attempted the more useful but more difficult task of writing in the half-formed tongue of his own country an account of the great painters of Italy and Holland.[68] Diderot makes the pointed remark about him, that he believed in equality of ranks by instinct, which is better than believing in it by reflection.[69] It was through the medium of this friendly and intelligent man that the Empress had acted in the purchase of Diderot's library. In 1769 he was appointed Russian minister at the Hague, and his chief ground for delight at the appointment was that it brought him within reach of his friends in Paris.

Diderot set out on his expedition some time in the summer of 1773 — the date also of Johnson's memorable tour to the Hebrides — and his first halt was at the Dutch capital, then at the distance of a four days' journey from Paris. Here he remained for many weeks, in some doubt whether or not to persist in the project of a more immense journey. He passed most of his time with the Prince and Princess Galitzin, as between a good brother and a good sister. Their house, he notices, had once been the residence of Barneveldt. Men like Diderot are the last persons to think of their own historic position, else we might have expected to find him musing on the saving shelter which this land of freedom and tolerance had given to more

than one of his great precursors in the literature of emancipation. Descartes had found twenty years of priceless freedom (1629-1649) among the Dutch burghers. The ruling ideas of the Encyclopædia came in direct line from Bayle (*d. 1706*) and Locke (*d. 1704*), and both Bayle and Locke, though in different measures, owed their security to the stout valour with which the Dutch defended their own land, and taught the English how to defend theirs, against the destructive pretensions of Catholic absolutism. Of these memories Diderot probably thought no more than Descartes thought about the learning of Grotius or the art of Rembrandt. It was not the age, nor was his the mind, for historic sentimentalism. "The more I see of this country," he wrote to his good friends in Paris, "the more I feel at home in it. The soles, fresh herrings, turbot, perch, are all the best people in the world. The walks are charming; I do not know whether the women are all very sage, but with their great straw hats, their eyes fixed on the ground, and the enormous fichus spread over their bosoms, they have the air of coming back from prayers or going to confession." Diderot did not fail to notice more serious things than this. His remarks on the means of travelling with most profit are full of sense, and the account which he wrote of Holland shows him to have been as widely reflective and observant as we should have expected him to be.[70] It will be more convenient to say something on this in connection with the stay which he again made at the Hague on his return from his pilgrimage to Russia.

After many hesitations the die was cast. Nariskin, a court chamberlain, took charge of the philosopher, and escorted him in an excellent carriage along the dreary road that ended in the capital reared by Peter the Great among the northern floods. It is worth while to digress for a few moments, to mark shortly the difference in social and intellectual conditions between the philosopher's own city and the city for which he was bound, and to touch on the significance of his journey. We can only in this way understand

the position of the Encyclopædists in Europe, and see why it is interesting to the student of the history of Western civilisation to know something about them. It is impossible to have a clear idea of the scope of the revolutionary philosophy, as well as of the singular pre-eminence of Paris over the western world, until we have placed ourselves, not only at Ferney and Grandval, and in the parlours of Madame Geoffrin and Mademoiselle Lespinasse, but also in palaces at Florence, Berlin, Vienna, and St. Petersburg.

From Holland with its free institutions, its peaceful industry, its husbanded wealth, its rich and original art, its great political and literary tradition, to go to Russia was to measure an arc of Western progress, and to retrace the steps of the genius of civilisation. The political capital of Russia represented a forced and artificial union between old and new conditions. In St. Petersburg, says an onlooker, were united the age of barbarism and the age of civilisation, the tenth century and the eighteenth, the manners of Asia and the manners of Europe, the rudest Scythians and the most polished Europeans, a brilliant and proud aristocracy and a people sunk in servitude. On one side were elegant fashions, magnificent dresses, sumptuous repasts, splendid feasts, theatres like those which gave grace and animation to the select circles of London or Paris: on the other side, shopkeepers in Asiatic dress, coachmen, servants, and peasants clad in sheepskins, wearing long beards, fur caps, and long fingerless gloves of skin, with short axes hanging from their leathern girdles. The thick woollen bands round their feet and legs resembled a rude cothurnus, and the sight of these uncouth figures reminded one who had seen the bas-reliefs on Trajan's column at Rome, of the Scythians, the Dacians, the Goths, the Roxolani, who had been the terror of the Empire.[71] Literary cultivation was confined to almost the smallest possible area. Oriental as Russia was in many respects, it was the opposite of oriental in one: women were then, as they are still sometimes said to be

in Russia, more cultivated and advanced than men. Many of them could speak half a dozen languages, could play on several instruments, and were familiar with the works of the famous poets of France, Italy, and England. Among the men, on the contrary, outside of a few exceptional families about the court, the vast majority were strangers to all that was passing beyond the limits of their own country. The few who had travelled and were on an intellectual level with their century, were as far removed from the rest of their countrymen as Englishmen are removed from Iroquois.

To paint the court of Catherine in its true colours it has been said that one ought to have the pen of Procopius. It was a hot-bed of corruption, intrigue, jealousy, violence, hatred. One day, surrounded by twenty-seven of her courtiers, Catherine said: "If I were to believe what you all say about one another, there is not one of you who does not richly deserve to have his head cut off." A certain princess was notorious for her inhuman barbarity. One day she discovered that one of her attendants was with child; in a frenzy she pursued the hapless Callisto from chamber to chamber, came up with her, dashed in her skull with a heavy weapon, and finally in a delirium of passion ripped up her body. When two nobles had a quarrel, they fell upon one another then and there like drunken navvies, and Potemkin had an eye gouged out in a court brawl. Such horrors give us a measure of the superior humanity of Versailles, and enable us also in passing to see how duelling could be a sign of a higher civilisation. The reigning passions were love of money and the gratification of a coarse vanity. Friendship, virtue, manners, delicacy, probity, said one witness, are here merely words, void of all meaning. The tone in public affairs was as low as in those of private conduct. I might as well, says Sir G. Macartney, quote Clarke and Tillotson at the divan of Constantinople, as invoke the authority of Puffendorf and Grotius here.

The character of the Empress herself has been more disputed than that of the society in which she was the one imposing personage. She stands in history with Elizabeth of England, with Catherine de' Medici, with Maria Theresa, among the women who have been like great men. Of her place in the record of the creation of that vast empire which begins with Prussia and ends with China, we have not here to speak. The materials for knowing her and judging her are only in our own time becoming accessible.[72] As usual, the mythic elements that surrounded her like a white fog from the northern seas out of which she loomed like a portent, are rapidly disappearing, and are replaced by the outlines of ordinary humanity, with more than the ordinary human measure of firmness, resolution, and energetic grasp of the facts of her position in the world.

We must go from the philosophers to the men of affairs for a true picture. These tell us that she offered an unprecedented mixture of courage and weakness, of knowledge and incompetence, of firmness and irresolution; passing in turn from the most opposite extremes, she presented a thousand diverse surfaces, until at last the observer had to content himself with putting her down as a consummate comedian. She had no ready apprehension. Too refined a pleasantry was thrown away upon her, and there was always a chance of her reversing its drift. No playful reference to the finances, or the military force, or even to the climate of her empire, was ever taken in good part.[73] The political part was the serious part of her nature. Catherine had the literary tastes, but not the literary skill, of Frederick. She is believed, on good evidence, to have written for the use of her grandsons not only an Abridgment of Russian History, but a volume of Moral Tales.[74] The composition of moral tales was entirely independent of morality. Just as Lewis XV. had a long series of Châteauroux, Pompadours, Dubarrys, so Catherine had her Orloffs and Potemkins, and a countless host of obscure and miscellaneous Wassiltchikows, Zavadowskys, Zoriczes,

Korsaks. On the serious side, Lewis XIV. was her great pattern and idol. She resented criticism on that renowned memory, as something personal to herself. To her business as sovereign — *mon petit ménage*, as she called the control of her huge formless empire — she devoted as much indefatigable industry as Lewis himself had done in his best days. Notwithstanding all her efforts to improve her country, she was not popular, and never won the affection of her subjects; but she probably cared less for the opinion and sentiment of Russia than for the applause of Europe. Tragedy displeases her, writes the French Minister, and comedy wearies her; she does not like music; her table is without any sort of exquisiteness; in a garden she cares only for roses; her only taste is to build and to drill her court, for the taste that she has for reigning, and for making a great figure in the universe, is really not so much taste as a downright absorbing passion.

Gunning, the English chargé d'affaires, insists that the motive of all her patriotic labours was not benevolence, but an insatiable and unbounded thirst for fame. "If it were not so, we must charge her with an inconsistency amounting to madness, for undertaking so many immense works of public utility, such as the foundation of colleges and academies on a most extensive plan and at an enormous outlay, and then leaving them incomplete, not even finishing the buildings for them." They had served the purpose of making foreigners laud the glory of the Semiramis of the north, and that was enough. The arts and sciences, said the French Minister, have plenty of academies here, but the academies have few subjects and fewer pupils. How could there be pupils in a country where there is nobody who is not either a courtier, a soldier, or a slave? The Princess Sophie of Anhalt, long before she dreamed of becoming the Czarina Catherine II., had been brought up by a French governess, and the tastes that her governess had implanted grew into a passion for French literature, which can only be compared to the same passion in Frederick the Great. Catherine only

continued a movement that had already in the reign of her predecessor gone to a considerable length. The social reaction against German political predominance had been accompanied by a leaning to France. French professors in art and literature had been tempted to Moscow, the nobles sent to Paris for their clothes and their furniture, and a French theatre was set up in St. Petersburg, where the nobles were forced to attend the performances under pain of a fine. Absentees and loiterers were hurried to their boxes by horse-patrols.

Catherine was more serious and intelligent than this in her pursuit of French culture. She had begun with the books in which most of the salt of old France was to be found, with Rabelais, Scarron, Montaigne; she cherished Molière and Corneille; and of the writers of the eighteenth century, apart from Voltaire, the author of Gil Blas was her favourite. Such a list tells its own tale of a mind turned to what is masculine, racy, pungent, and thoroughly sapid. "I am a Gauloise of the north," she said, "I only understand the old French; I do not understand the new. I made up my mind to get something out of your gentry, the learned men in *ist*: I have tried them; I made some of them come here; I occasionally wrote to them; they wearied me to death, and never understood me; there was only my good protector, Voltaire. Do you know it was Voltaire who made me the fashion?"[75] This was a confidential revelation, made long after most of the philosophers were dead. We might have penetrated the secret of her friendship for such a man as Diderot, even with less direct evidence than this. It was the vogue of the philosophers, and not their philosophy that made Catherine their friend. They were the great interest of Europe at this time, just as Greek scholars had been its interest in one century, painters in another, great masters of religious controversy in a third. "What makes the great merit of France," said Voltaire, "what makes its unique superiority, is a small number of sublime or delightful men of genius, who cause French to

be spoken at Vienna, at Stockholm, and at Moscow. Your ministers, your intendants, your chief secretaries have no part in all this glory." This vogue of the philosophers brought the whole literature of their country into universal repute. In the depths of the Crimea a khan of the Tartars took a delight in having Tartufe and the Bourgeois Gentilhomme read aloud to him.[76]

As soon as Catherine came into power (1762), she at once applied herself to make friends in this powerful region. It was a matter of course that she should begin with the omnipotent pontiff at Ferney. Graceful verses from Voltaire were as indispensable an ornament to a crowned head as a diadem, and Catherine answered with compliments that were perhaps more sincere than his verses. She wonders how she can repay him for a bundle of books that he had sent to her, and at last bethinks herself that nothing will please the lover of mankind so much as the introduction of inoculation into the great empire; so she sends for Dr. Dimsdale from England, and submits to the unfamiliar rite in her own sacred person. Presents of furs are sent to the hermit of the Alps, and he is told how fortunate the imperial messenger counts himself in being despatched to Ferney. What flattered Voltaire more than furs was Catherine's promptitude and exactness in keeping him informed of her military and political movements against Turkey. It made him a centre of European intelligence in more senses than one, and helped him in his lifelong battle to pose, in his letters at least, as the equal of his friend, the King of Prussia. For D'Alembert the Empress professed an admiration only less than she felt for Voltaire. She was eager that he should come to Russia to superintend the instruction of the young Grand Duke. But D'Alembert was too prudent to go to St. Petersburg, as he was too prudent to go to Berlin. Montesquieu had died five years before her accession, but his influence remained. She habitually called the Spirit of Laws the breviary of kings, and when she drew up her Instruction for a new code, she

acknowledged how much she had pillaged from Montesquieu. “I hope,” she said, “that if from the other world he sees me at work, he will forgive my plagiarism for the sake of the twenty millions of men who will benefit by it.” In truth the twenty millions of men got very little benefit indeed by the code. Montesquieu’s own method might have taught her that not even absolute power can force the civil system of free labour into a society resting on serfdom. But it is not surprising that Catherine was no wiser than more democratic reformers who had drunk from the French springs. Or probably she had a lower estimate in her own heart of the value of her code for practical purposes than it suited her to disclose to a Parisian philosopher.

Catherine did not forget that, though the French at this time were pre-eminent in the literature of new ideas, yet there were meritorious and useful men in other countries. One of her correspondents was Zimmermann of Hanover, whose essay on Solitude the shelves of no second-hand bookseller’s shop is ever without. She had tried hard to bribe Beccaria to leave Florence for St. Petersburg. She succeeded in persuading Euler to return to a capital whither he had been invited many years before by the first Catherine, and where he now remained.

Both Catherine’s position and her temperament made the society of her own sex of little use or interest to her. “I don’t know whether it is custom or inclination,” she wrote, “but somehow I can never carry on conversation except with men. There are only two women in the world with whom I can talk for half an hour at once.” Yet among her most intimate correspondents was one woman well known in the Encyclopædic circle. She kept up an active exchange of letters with Madame Geoffrin — that interesting personage, who though belonging to the bourgeoisie, and possessing not a trace of literary genius, yet was respectfully courted not only by Catherine, but by Stanislas, Gustavus, and Joseph II.[77]

On the whole then we must regard Catherine's European correspondence as at least in some measure the result of political calculation. Its purposes, as has been said, were partly those to which in our own times some governments devote a Reptile-fund. There is a letter from the Duchesse de Choiseul to Madame du Deffand, her intimate friend, and the friend of so many of the literary circle, in which the secret of the relations between Catherine and the men of letters is very plainly told. "All that," she writes — protection of arts and sciences— "is mere luxury and a caprice of fashion in our age. All such pompous jargon is the product of vanity, not of principles or of reflection.... The Empress of Russia has another object in protecting literature; she has had sense enough to feel that she had need of the protection of the men of letters. She has flattered herself that their base praises would cover with an impenetrable veil in the eyes of her contemporaries and of posterity, the crimes with which she has astonished the universe and revolted humanity.... The men of letters, on the other hand, flattered, cajoled, caressed by her, are vain of the protection that they are able to throw over her, and dupes of the coquetries that she lavishes on them. These people who say and believe that they are the instructors of the masters of the world, sink so low as actually to take a pride in the protection that this monster seems in her turn to accord to them, simply because she sits on a throne."[78]

In short, the monarchs of the north understood and used the new forces of the men of letters, whom their own sovereign only recognised to oppress. The contrast between the liberalism of the northern sovereigns, and the obscurantism of the court of France, was never lost from sight. Marmontel's *Belisarius* was condemned by the Sorbonne, and burnt at the foot of the great staircase of the Palace of Justice; in Russia a group of courtiers hastened to translate it, and the Empress herself undertook one chapter of the work. Diderot, who was not allowed to enter the French Academy, was

an honoured guest at the Russian palace. For all this Catherine was handsomely repaid. When Diderot visited St. Petersburg, Voltaire congratulated the Empress on seeing that unique man; but Diderot is not, he added, "the only Frenchman who is an enthusiast for your glory. We are lay missionaries who preach the religion of Saint Catherine, and we can boast that our church is tolerably universal."[79] We have already seen Catherine's generosity in buying Diderot's books, and paying him for guarding them as her librarian. "I should never have expected," she says, "that the purchase of a library would bring me so many fine compliments; all the world is bepraising me about M. Diderot's library. But now confess, you to whom humanity is indebted for the strong support that you have given to innocence and virtue in the person of Calas, that it would have been cruel and unjust to separate a student from his books."[80] "Ah, madam," replies the most graceful of all courtiers, "let your imperial majesty forgive me; no, you are not the aurora borealis; you are assuredly the most brilliant star of the north, and never was there one so beneficent as you. Andromeda, Perseus, Callisto are not your equals. All these stars would have left Diderot to die of starvation. He was persecuted in his own country, and your benefactions came thither to seek him! Lewis XIV. was less munificent than your majesty: he rewarded merit in foreign countries, but other people pointed it out to him, whereas you, madame, go in search of it and find it for yourself. Your generous pains to establish freedom of conscience in Poland are a piece of beneficence that the human race must ever celebrate."[81]

When the first Partition of Poland took place seven years later, Catherine found that she had not cultivated the friendship of the French philosophers to no purpose. The action of the dominant party in Poland enabled Catherine to take up a line which touched the French philosophers in their tenderest part. The Polish oligarchy was Catholic, and imposed crushing

disabilities on the non-Catholic part of the population. "At the slightest attempt in favour of the non-Catholics," King Stanislas writes to Madame Geoffrin, of the Diet of 1764, "there arose such a cry of fanaticism! The difficulty as to the naturalisation of foreigners, the contempt for *roturiers* and the oppression of them, and Catholic intolerance, are the three strongest national prejudices that I have to fight against in my countrymen; they are at bottom good folk, but their education and ignorance render them excessively stubborn on these three heads."[82] Poland in short reproduced in an aggravated and more barbaric form those evils of Catholic feudalism, in which the philosophers saw the arch-curse of their own country. Catherine took the side of the Dissidents, and figured as the champion of religious toleration. Toleration was chief among the philosophic watchwords, and seeing that great device on her banners, the Encyclopædic party asked no further questions. So, with the significant exception of Rousseau, they all abstained from the cant about the Partition which has so often been heard from European liberals in later days. And so with reference to more questionable transactions of an earlier date, no one could guess from the writings of the philosophers that Catherine had ever been suspected of uniting with her husband in a plot to poison the Empress Elizabeth, and then uniting with her lover in a plot to strangle her husband. "I am quite aware," said Voltaire, "that she is reproached with some bagatelles in the matter of her husband, but these are family affairs with which I cannot possibly think of meddling."

One curious instance of Catherine's sensibility to European opinion is connected with her relations to Diderot. Rulhière, afterwards well known in literature as a historian, began life as secretary to Breteuil, in the French embassy at St. Petersburg. An eyewitness of the tragedy which seated Catherine on the throne, he wrote an account of the events of the revolution of 1762. This piquant narrative, composed by a young man who had read

Tacitus and Sallust was circulated in manuscript among the salons of Paris (1768). Diderot had warned Rulhière that it was infinitely dangerous to speak about princes, that not everything that is true is fit to be told, that he could not be too careful of the feelings of a great sovereign who was the admiration and delight of her people. Catherine pretended that a mere secretary of an embassy could know very little about the real springs and motives of the conspiracy. Diderot had described the manuscript as painting her in a commanding and imperious attitude. "There was nothing of that sort," she said; "it was only a question of perishing with a madman, or saving oneself with the multitude who insisted on coming to the rescue." What she saw was that the manuscript must be bought, and she did her best first to buy the author and then, when this failed, to have him locked up in the Bastille. She succeeded in neither. The French government were not sorry to have a scourge to their hands. All that Diderot could procure from Rulhière was a promise that the work should not be published during the Empress's lifetime. It was actually given to the world in 1797. When Diderot was at St. Petersburg, the Empress was importunate to know the contents of the manuscript, which he had seen, but of which she was unable to procure a copy. "As far as you are concerned," he said, "if you attach great importance, Madame, to the decencies and virtues, the worn-out rags of your sex, this work is a satire against you; but if large views and masculine and patriotic designs concern you more, the author depicts you as a great princess." The Empress answered that this only increased her desire to read the book. Diderot himself truly enough described it as a historic romance, containing a mixed tissue of lies and truths that posterity would compare to a chapter of Tacitus.[83] Perhaps the only piece of it that posterity will really value is the page in which the writer describes Catherine's personal appearance; her broad and open brow, her large and slightly double chin, her hair of resplendent chestnut, her eyes of a brilliant

brown into which the reflections of the light brought shades of blue. “Pride,” he says, “is the true characteristic of her physiognomy. The amiability and grace which are there too only seem to penetrating eyes to be the effect of an extreme desire to please, and these seductive expressions somehow let the design of seducing be rather too clearly seen.”

The first Frenchman whom Catherine welcomed in person to her court was Falconet, of whose controversy with the philosopher we shall have a few words to say in a later chapter. This introduction to her was due to Diderot. She had entreated him to find for her a sculptor who would undertake a colossal statue of Peter the Great. Falconet was at the height of his reputation in his own country; in leaving it he seems to have been actuated by no other motive than the desire of an opportunity of erecting an immense monument of his art, though Diderot’s eloquence was not wanting. Falconet had the proverbial temperament of artistic genius. Diderot called him the Jean Jacques of sculpture. He had none of the rapacity for money which has distinguished so many artists in their dealings with foreign princes, but he was irritable, turbulent, restless, intractable. He was a chivalrous defender of poorer brethren in art, and he was never a respecter of persons. His feuds with Betzki, the Empress’s faithful factotum, were as acrid as the feuds between Voltaire and Maupertuis. Betzki had his own ideas about the statue that was to do honour to the founder of the Empire, and he insisted that the famous equestrian figure of Marcus Aurelius should be the model. Falconet was a man of genius, and he retorted that what might be good for Marcus Aurelius would not be good for Peter the Great. The courtly battle does not concern us, though some of its episodes offer tempting illustrations of biting French malice. Falconet had his own way, and after the labour of many years, a colossus of bronze bestrode a charger rearing on a monstrous mass of unhewn granite. Catherine took the liveliest interest in her artist’s work, frequently visiting

his studio, and keeping up a busy correspondence. With him, as with the others, she insisted that he should stand on no ceremony, and should not spin out his lines with epithets on which she set not the smallest value. She may be said to have encouraged him to pester her with a host of his obscure countrymen in search of a living, and a little colony of Frenchmen whose names tell us nothing, hung about the Russian capital. Diderot's account of this group of his countrymen at St. Petersburg recalls the picture of a corresponding group at Berlin. "Most of the French who are here rend and hate one another, and bring contempt both on themselves and their nation: 'tis the most unworthy set of rascals that you can imagine."[84]

Diderot reached St. Petersburg towards the end of 1773, and he remained some five months, until the beginning of March, 1774. His impulsive nature was shocked by a chilly welcome from Falconet, but at the palace his reception was most cordial, as his arrival had been eagerly anticipated. The Empress always professed to detest ceremony and state. In a letter to Madame Geoffrin she insists, as we have already seen her doing with Falconet, on being treated to no oriental prostrations, as if she were at the court of Persia. "There is nothing in the world so ugly and detestable as greatness. When I go into a room, you would say that I am the head of Medusa: everybody turns to stone. I constantly scream like an eagle against such ways; yet the more I scream, the less are they at their ease.... If you came into my room, I should say to you, — Madame, be seated; let us chatter at our ease. You would have a chair in front of me; there would be a table between us. *Et puis des bâtons rompus, tant et plus, c'est mon fort.*"

This is an exact description of her real behaviour to Diderot. On most days he was in her society from three in the afternoon until five or six. Etiquette was banished. Diderot's simplicity and vehemence were as conspicuous and as unrestrained at Tsarskoe-selo as at Grandval or the Rue Taranne. If for a moment the torrent of his improvisation was checked by

the thought that he was talking to a great lady, Catherine encouraged him to go on. "*Allons*," she cried, "*entre hommes tout est permis*." The philosopher in the heat of exposition brought his hands down upon the imperial knees with such force and iteration, that Catherine complained that he made them black and blue. She was sometimes glad to seek shelter from such zealous enforcement of truth, behind a strong table. Watchful diplomatists could not doubt that such interviews must have reference to politics. Cathcart, the English ambassador, writes to his government that M. Diderot is still with the Empress at Tsarskoe-selo, "pursuing his political intrigues." And, amazing as it may seem, the French minister and the French ambassador both of them believed that they had found in this dreaming rhapsodical genius a useful diplomatic instrument. "The interviews between Catherine and Diderot follow one another incessantly, and go on from day to day. He told me, and I have reasons for believing that he is speaking the truth, that he has painted the danger of the alliance of Russia with the King of Prussia, and the advantage of an alliance with us. The Empress, far from blaming this freedom, encouraged him by word and gesture. 'You are not fond of that prince,' she said to Diderot. 'No,' he replied, 'he is a great man, but a bad king, and a dealer in counterfeit coin.' 'Oh,' said she laughing, 'I have had my share of his coin.'"

The first Partition of Poland had been finally consummated in the Polish Diet in the autumn of 1773, a few weeks before Diderot's arrival at St. Petersburg. Lewis XV., now drawing very near to his end, and D'Aiguillon, his minister, had some uneasiness at this opening of the great era of territorial revolution, and looked about in a shiftless way for an ally against Russia and Prussia. England sensibly refused to stir. Then France, as we see, was only anxious to detach Catherine from Frederick. All was shiftless and feeble, and the French government can have known little of the Empress, if they thought that Diderot was the man to affect her strong and

positive mind. She told Ségur in later years what success Diderot had with her as a politician.

"I talked much and frequently with him," said Catherine, "but with more curiosity than profit. If I had believed him, everything would have been turned upside down in my kingdom; legislation, administration, finances — all to be turned topsy-turvy to make room for impracticable theories. Yet as I listened more than I talked, any witness who happened to be present, would have taken him for a severe pedagogue, and me for his humble scholar. Probably he thought so himself, for after some time, seeing that none of these great innovations were made which he had recommended, he showed surprise and a haughty kind of dissatisfaction. Then speaking openly, I said to him: *Mr. Diderot, I have listened with the greatest pleasure to all that your brilliant intelligence has inspired; and with all your great principles, which I understand very well, one would make fine books, but very bad business. You forget in all your plans of reform the difference in our positions; you only work on paper, which endures all things; it opposes no obstacle either to your imagination or to your pen. But I, poor Empress as I am, work on the human skin, which is irritable and ticklish to a very different degree.* I am persuaded that from this moment he pitied me as a narrow and vulgar spirit. For the future he only talked about literature, and politics vanished from our conversation."[85]

Catherine was mistaken, as we shall see, in supposing that Diderot ever thought her less than the greatest of men. Cathcart, the English ambassador, writes in a sour strain: "All his letters are filled with panegyrics of the Empress, whom he depicts as above humanity. His flatteries of the Grand Duke have been no less gross, but be it said to the young prince's honour, he has shown as much contempt for such flatteries as for the mischievous principles of this pretended philosopher."

Frederick tells D'Alembert that though the Empress overwhelms Diderot with favours, people at St. Petersburg find him tiresome and disputatious, and "talking the same rigmarole over and over again." In her letters to Voltaire, Catherine lets nothing of this be seen. She finds Diderot's imagination inexhaustible, and ranks him among the most extraordinary men that have ever lived; she delights in his conversation, and his visits have given her the most uncommon pleasure. All this was perhaps true enough. Catherine probably rated the philosopher at his true worth as a great talker and a singular and original genius, but this did not prevent her, any more than it need prevent us, from seeing the limits and measure. She was not one of the weaker heads who can never be content without either wholesale enthusiasm or wholesale disparagement.

Diderot had a companion who pleased her better than Diderot himself. Grimm came to St. Petersburg at this time to pay his first visit, and had a great success. "The Empress," wrote Madame Geoffrin to King Stanislas, "lavished all her graces on Grimm. And he has everything that is needed to make him worthy of them. Diderot has neither the fineness of perception, nor the delicate tact that Grimm has, and so he has not had the success of Grimm. Diderot is always in himself, and sees nothing in other people that has not some reference to himself. He is a man of a great deal of understanding, but his nature and turn of mind make him good for nothing, and, more than that, would make him a very dangerous person in any employment. Grimm is quite the contrary."[86]

In truth, as we have said before, Grimm was one of the shrewdest heads in the Encyclopædic party; he had much knowledge, a judgment both solid and acute, and a certain easy fashion of social commerce, free from raptures and full of good sense. Yet he was as devoted and ecstatic in his feelings about the Empress as his more impetuous friend. "Here," he says, "was no conversation of leaps and bounds, in which idleness traverses a whole

gallery of ideas that have no connection with one another, and weariness draws you away from one object to skim a dozen others. They were talks in which all was bound together, often by imperceptible threads, but all the more naturally, as not a word of what was to be said had been led up to or prepared beforehand." Grimm cannot find words to describe her verve, her stream of brilliant sallies, her dashing traits, her eagle's *coup d'œil*. No wonder that he used to quit her presence so electrified as to pass half the night in marching up and down his room, beset and pursued by all the fine and marvellous things that had been said. How much of all this is true, and how much of it is the voice of the bewildered courtier, it might be hard to decide. But the rays of the imperial sun did not so far blind his prudence, as to make him accept a pressing invitation to remain permanently in Catherine's service. When Diderot quitted St. Petersburg, Grimm went to Italy. After an interlude there, he returned to Russia and was at once restored to high favour. When the time came for him to leave her, the Empress gave him a yearly pension of two thousand roubles, or about ten thousand livres, and with a minute considerateness that is said not to be common among the great, she presently ordered that it should be paid in such a form that he should not lose on the exchange between France and Russia. Whether she had a special object in keeping Grimm in good humour, we hardly know. What is certain is that from 1776 until the fall of the French monarchy she kept up a voluminous correspondence with him, and that he acted as an unofficial intermediary between her and the ministers at Versailles. Every day she wrote down what she wished to say to Grimm, and at the end of every three months these daily sheets were made into a bulky packet and despatched to Paris by a special courier, who returned with a similar packet from Grimm. This intercourse went on until the very height of the Revolution, when Grimm at last, in February, 1792,

fled from Paris. The Empress's helpful friendship continued to the end of her life (1796).[87]

Diderot arrived at the Hague on his return from Russia in the first week of April (1774), after making a rapid journey of seven hundred leagues in three weeks and a day. D'Alembert had been anxious that Frederick of Prussia should invite Diderot to visit him at Berlin. Frederick had told him that, intrepid reader as he was, he could not endure to read Diderot's books. "There reigns in them a tone of self-sufficiency and an arrogance which revolt the instinct of my freedom. It was not in such a style that Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Locke, Gassendi, Bayle, and Newton wrote." D'Alembert replied that the king would judge more favourably of the philosopher's person than of his works; that he would find in Diderot, along with much fecundity, imagination, and knowledge, a gentle heat and a great deal of amenity.[88] Frederick, however, did not send the invitation, and Diderot willingly enough went homeward by the northern route by which he had come. He passed Königsberg, where, if he had known it, Kant was then meditating the Critic of Pure Reason. It is hardly probable that Diderot met the famous worthy who was destined to deal so heavy a blow to the Encyclopædic way of thinking, and to leave a name not less illustrious than Frederick or Catherine. A court official was sent in charge of the philosopher. The troubles of posting by the sea-road between Königsberg and Memel had moved him to the composition of some very bad verses on his first journey; and the horror of crossing the Dwina inspired others that were no better on his return. The weather was hard; four carriages were broken in the journey. He expected to be drowned as the ice creaked under his horses' feet at Riga, and he thought that he had broken an arm and a shoulder as he crossed the ferry at Mittau. But all ended well, and he found himself once more under the roof of Prince Galitzin at the Hague. Hence he wrote to his wife and his other friends in Paris, that it must be a great

consolation to them to know that he was only separated from them by a journey of four days. That journey was not taken, however, for nearly four months. Diderot had promised the Empress that he would publish a set of the regulations for the various institutions which she had founded for the improvement of her realm. This could only be done, or could best be done, in Holland. His life there was spent as usual in the slavery of proof-sheets, tempered by daily bursts of conversation, rhapsody, discussion, and dreamy contemplation. He made the acquaintance of a certain Björnstähl, a professor of oriental languages at the university of Lund in Sweden, and a few pages in this obscure writer's obscure book contain the only glimpse that we have of the philosopher on his travels.[89] Diderot was as ecstatic in conversation, as we know him to have been in his correspondence, in praise of the august friend whom he had left. The least of his compliments was that she united the charms of Cleopatra to the soul of Cæsar, or sometimes it was, to the soul of Brutus.

"At the Hague," says Björnstähl, "we go about every day with M. Diderot. He has views extending over an incredibly wide field, possesses a vivacity that I cannot describe, is pleasant and friendly in intercourse, and has new and unusual observations to make on every subject.... Who could fail to prize him? He is so bright, so full of instruction, has so many new thoughts and suggestions, that nobody can help admiring him. But willingly as he talks when one goes to him, he shows to little advantage in large companies, and that is why he did not please everybody at St. Petersburg. You will easily see the reason why this incomparable man in such companies, where people talk of fashion, of clothes, of frippery, and all other sorts of triviality, neither gives pleasure to others nor finds pleasure himself." And the friendly Swede rises to the height of generalisation in the quaint maxim, Where an empty head shines, there a thoroughly cultivated man comes too short.

Björnstähl quotes a saying of Voltaire, that Diderot would have been a poet if he had not wished to be a philosopher — a remark that was rather due perhaps to Voltaire's habitual complaisance than to any serious consideration of Diderot's qualities. But if he could not be a poet himself, at least he knew Pindar and Homer by heart, and at the Hague he never stirred out without a Horace in his pocket. And though no poet, he was full of poetic sentiment. Scheveningen, the little bathing-place a short distance from the Hague, was Diderot's favourite spot. "It was there," he writes, "that I used to see the horizon dark, the sea covered with white haze, the waves rolling and tumbling, and far out the poor fishermen in their great clumsy boats; on the shore a multitude of women frozen with cold or apprehension, trying to warm themselves in the sun. When the work was at an end and the boats had landed, the beach was covered with fish of every kind. These good people have the simplicity, the openness, the filial and fraternal piety of old time. As the men come down from their boats, their wives throw themselves into their arms, they embrace their fathers and their little ones; each loads himself with fish; the son tosses his father a codfish or a salmon, which the old man carries off in triumph to his cottage, thanking heaven that it has given him so industrious and worthy a son. When he has gone indoors, the sight of the fish rejoices the old man's mate; it is quickly cut in pieces, the less lucky neighbours invited, it is speedily eaten, and the room resounds with thanks to God, and cheerful songs."[90]

These scenes, with their sea-background, their animation, their broad strokes of the simple, tender, and real in life, may well have been after Diderot's own heart. He often told me, says Björnstähl, that he never found the hours pass slowly in the company of a peasant, or a cobbler, or any handicraftsman, but that he had many a time found them pass slowly enough in the society of a courtier. "For of the one," he said, "one can

always ask about useful and necessary things, but the other is mostly, so far as anything useful is concerned, empty and void."

The characteristics of the European capitals a century ago were believed to be hit off in the saying, that each of them would furnish the proper cure for a given defect of character. The over-elegant were to go to London, savages to Paris, bigots to Berlin, rebels to St. Petersburg, people who were too sincere to Rome, the over-learned to Brussels, and people who were too lively to the Hague. Yet the dulness thus charged against the Hague was not universally admitted. Impartial travellers assigned to the talk of cultivated circles there a rank not below that of similar circles in France and England. Some went even farther, and declared Holland to have a distinct advantage, because people were never embarrassed either by the levity and sparkling wit of France on the one hand, nor by the depressing reserve and taciturnity of England on the other.[91] Yet Holland was fully within the sphere of the great intellectual commonwealth of the west, and was as directly accessible to the literary influences of the time as it had ever been. If Diderot had inquired into the vernacular productions of the country, he would have found that here also the wave of reaction against French conventions, the tide of English simplicity and domestic sentimentalism, had passed into literature. The *Spectator* and *Clarissa Harlowe* inspired the writers of Holland, as they had inspired Diderot himself.[92]

In erudition, it was still what, even after the death of Scaliger, it had remained through the seventeenth century, the most learned state of Europe; and the elder Hemsterhuys, with such pupils as Ruhnken and Valckenaer, kept up as well as he could the scholarly tradition of Gronovius and Grævius. But the eighteenth century was not the century of erudition. Scholarship had given way to speculation.

Among the interesting persons whom Diderot saw at the Hague, the most interesting is the amiable and learned son of the elder Hemsterhuys, himself

by the way not Dutch, but the son of a Frenchman. Hemsterhuys had been greatly interested in what he had heard of Diderot's character,[93] though we have no record of the impression that was made by personal acquaintance. If Diderot was playfully styled the French Socrates, the younger Hemsterhuys won from his friends the name of the Dutch Plato. The Hollanders pointed to this meditative figure, to his great attainments in the knowledge of ancient literature and art, to his mellowed philosophising, to his gracious and well-bred style, as a proof that their country was capable of developing both the strength and the sensibility of human nature to their highest point.[94] And he has a place in the history of modern speculation. As we think of him and Diderot discussing, we feel ourselves to be placed at a point that seems to command the diverging streams and eddying currents of the time. In this pair two great tides of thought meet for a moment, and then flow on in their deep appointed courses. For Hemsterhuys, born a Platonist to the core, became a leader of the reaction against the French philosophy of illumination — of sensation, of experience, of the verifiable. He contributed a marked current to the mysticism and pietism which crept over Germany before the French revolution, and to that religious philosophy which became a point of patriotic honour both in Germany and at the Russian Court, after the revolutionary war had seemed to identify the rival philosophy of the Encyclopædists with the victorious fury of the national enemy. Jacobi, a chief of the mystic tribe, had begun the attack on the French with weapons avowedly borrowed from the sentimentalism of Rousseau, but by and by he found in Hemsterhuys more genuinely intellectual arguments for his vindication of feeling and the heart against the Encyclopædist claim for the supremacy of the understanding.

Diderot's hostess at the Hague is a conspicuous figure in the history of this movement. Prince Galitzin had married the daughter of Frederick's field-marshal, Schmettau. Goethe, who saw her (1797) many years after

Diderot was dead, describes her as one of those whom one cannot understand without seeing; as a person not rightly judged unless considered not only in connection, but in conflict, with her time. If she was remarkable to Goethe when fifty years had set their mark upon her, she was even more so to the impetuous Diderot in all the flush and intellectual excitement of her youth. It was to the brilliance and versatility of the Princess Galitzin that her husband's house owed its consideration and its charm. "She is very lively," said Diderot, "very gay, very intelligent; more than young enough, instructed and full of talents; she has read; she knows several languages, as Germans usually do; she plays on the clavecin, and sings like an angel; she is full of expressions that are at once ingenuous and piquant; she is exceedingly kind-hearted."[95] But he could not persuade her to take his philosophy on trust. Diderot is said, by the Princess's biographer, to have been a fervid proselytiser, eager to make people believe "his poems about eternally revolving atoms, through whose accidental encounter the present ordering of the world was developed." The Princess met his brilliant eloquence with a demand for proof. Her ever-repeated *Why?* and *How?* are said to have shown "the hero of atheism his complete emptiness and weakness."[96] In the long run Diderot was completely routed in favour of the rival philosophy. Hemsterhuys became bound to the Princess by the closest friendship, and his letters to her are as striking an illustration as any in literature of the peculiar devotion and admiration which a clever and sympathetic woman may arouse in philosophic minds of a certain calibre — in a Condillac, a Joubert, a D'Alembert, a Mill. Though Hemsterhuys himself never advanced from a philosophy of religion to the active region of dogmatic professions, his disciple could not find contentment on his austere heights. In the very year of Diderot's death (1784) the Princess Galitzin became a catholic, and her son became not only a catholic but a zealous missionary of the faith in America.

This, however, was not yet. The patriotic Björnstähl was very anxious that Diderot should go to Stockholm, to see for himself that the Holstein blood was as noble in Sweden as it was in Russia. Diderot replied that he would greatly have liked to see on the throne the sovereign (Gustavus III.) who was so nearly coming to pay him a visit on his own fourth storey in Paris. But he confessed that he was growing homesick, and Stockholm must remain unvisited. In September (1774) Diderot set his face homewards. "I shall gain my fireside," he wrote on the eve of his journey, "never to quit it again for the rest of my life. The time that we count by the year has gone, and the time that we must count by the day comes in its stead. The less one's income, the more important to use it well. I have perhaps half a score of years at the bottom of my wallet. In these ten years, fluxions, rheumatisms, and the other members of that troublesome family will take two or three of them; let us try to economise the seven that are left, for the repose and the small happinesses that a man may promise himself on the wrong side of sixty." The guess was a good one. Diderot lived ten years more, and although his own work in the world was done, they were years of great moment both to France and the world. They witnessed the establishment of a republic in the American colonies, and they witnessed the final stage in the decay of the old monarchy in France. Turgot had been made controller-general in the months before Diderot's return, and Turgot's ministry was the last serious experiment in the direction of orderly reform. The crash that followed resounded almost as loudly at St. Petersburg and in Holland as in France itself, and Catherine, in 1792, ordered all the busts of Voltaire that had adorned the saloons and corridors of her palace to be thrust ignominiously down into the cellars.

CHAPTER V. HELVÉTIUS.

BEFORE PROCEEDING TO the closing chapter of Diderot's life, I propose to give a short account of three remarkable books, of all of which he was commonly regarded as the inspirer, which were all certainly the direct and natural work of the Encyclopædic school, and which all play a striking part in the intellectual commotions of the century.

The great attack on the Encyclopædia was made, as we have already seen, in 1758, after the publication of the seventh volume. The same prosecution levelled an angrier blow at Helvétius's famous treatise, *L'Esprit*. It is not too much to say, that of all the proscribed books of the century, that excited the keenest resentment. This arose partly because it came earliest in the literature of attack. It was an audacious surprise. The censor who had allowed it to pass the ordeal of official approval was cashiered, and the author was dismissed from an honorary post in the Queen's household.[97] The indictment described the book as "the code of the most hateful and infamous passions," as a collection into one cover of everything that impiety could imagine, calculated to engender hatred against Christianity and Catholicism. The court condemned the book to be burnt, and, as if to show that the motive was not mere discontent with Helvétius's paradoxes, the same fire consumed Voltaire's fine poem on Natural Religion. Less prejudiced authorities thought nearly as ill of the book, as the lawyers of the parliament and the doctors of the Sorbonne had thought. Rousseau pronounced it detestable, wrote notes in refutation of its principles, and was inspired by hatred of its doctrine to compose some of the most fervid pages in the Savoyard Vicar's glowing Profession of Faith.[98] Even Diderot, though his friendly feeling for the writer and his general leaning to speculative hardihood warped his judgment so far as to make him

rank *L'Esprit* along with Montesquieu's *Spirit of Laws*, and Buffon's *Natural History*, among the great books of the century, still perceived and showed that the whole fabric rested on a foundation of paradox, and that, though there might be many truths of detail in the book, very many of its general principles are false.[99] Turgot described it as a book of philosophy without logic, literature without taste, and morality without goodness.[100]

In the same weighty piece of criticism, which contains in two or three pages so much permanently valuable truth, Turgot proceeds:— "When people wish to attack intolerance and injustice, it is essential in the first place to rest upon just ideas, for inquisitors have an interest in being intolerant, and viziers and subviziers have an interest in maintaining all the abuses of the government. As they are the strongest, you only give them a good excuse by sounding the tocsin against them right and left. I hate despotism as much as most people; but it is not by declamations that despotism ought to be attacked. And even in despotism there are degrees; there is a multitude of abuses in despotism, in which the princes themselves have no interest; there are others which they only allow themselves to practise, because public opinion is not yet fixed as to their injustice, and their mischievous consequences. People deserve far better from a nation for attacking these abuses with clearness, with courage, and above all by interesting the sentiment of humanity, than for any amount of eloquent reproach. Where there is no insult, there is seldom any offence.... There is no form of government without certain drawbacks, which the governments themselves would fain have it in their power to remedy, or without abuses which they nearly all intend to repress at least at some future day. We may therefore serve them all by treating questions of the public good in a calm and solid style; not coldly, still less with extravagance, but with that interesting warmth which springs from a profound feeling for justice and love of order."[101]

Of course it is a question whether, even in 1758, a generation before the convulsion, it was possible for the French monarchy spontaneously to work out the long list of indispensable improvements; still, at that date, Turgot might be excused for thinking that the progress which he desired might be attained without the violence to which Helvétius's diatribes so unmistakably pointed. His words, in any case, are worth quoting for their own grave and universal sense, and because they place us exactly at the point of view for regarding *L'Esprit* rightly. He seizes on its political aspect, its assault on government, and the social ordering of the time, as containing the book's real drift. In this, as in the rest of the destructive literature of the first sixty years of the century, the church was no doubt that part of the social foundations against which the assault was most direct and most vindictive, and it was the church, in the case of Helvétius's book, that first took alarm. Indeed, we may say that, from the very nature of things, in whatever direction the revolutionary host moved, they were sure to find themselves confronted by the church. It lay across the track of light at every point. Voltaire pierced its dogma. Rousseau shamed its irreligious temper. Diderot brought into relief the vicious absoluteness of its philosophy. Then came Helvétius and Holbach, not merely with criticism, but with substitutes. Holbach brought a new dogma of the universe, matter and motion, and fortuitous shapes. Helvétius brought a theory of human character, and a new analysis of morals — interest the basis of justice, pleasure the true interpretation of interest, and character the creature of education and laws.

To press such positions as these, was to recast the whole body of opinions on which society rested. As the church was the organ of the old opinions, Helvétius's book was instantly seized by the ecclesiastical authorities in accordance with a perfectly right instinct, and was made the occasion for the first violent raid upon a wholesale scale. When, however, we look beyond the smoke of the ecclesiastical battle, and weigh *L'Esprit*

itself on its own merits, we see quite plainly that Helvétius was thinking less of the theological disputes of the day than of bringing the philosophy of sensation, the philosophy of Locke and Condillac, into the political field, and of deriving from it new standards and new forces for social reconstruction. And in spite of its shallowness and paradoxes, his book did contain the one principle on which, if it had been generally accepted, the inevitable transition might have taken place without a Reign of Terror.

It was commonly said, by his enemies and by his alarmed friends, that vanity and a restless overweening desire for notoriety was the inspiring motive of Helvétius. He came from a German stock. His great-grandfather settled in Holland, where he cured his patients by cunning elixirs, by the powder of ground stag's horn, and the subtle virtues of crocodiles' teeth. His grandfather went to push his fortunes in Paris, where he persuaded the public to accept the healing properties of ipecacuanha, and Lewis XIV. (1689) gave him a short patent for that drug.[102] The medical tradition of the family was maintained in a third generation, for Helvétius's father was one of the physicians of the Queen, and on one occasion performed the doubtful service to humanity of saving the life of Lewis XV. Helvétius, who was born in 1715, turned aside from the calling of his ancestors, and by means of the favour which his father enjoyed at court, obtained a position as farmer-general. This at once made him a wealthy man, but wealth was not enough to satisfy him without fame. He made attempts in various directions, in each case following the current of popularity for the hour. Maupertuis was the hero of a day, and Helvétius accordingly applied himself to become a geometer. Voltaire's brilliant success brought poetry into fashion, and so Helvétius wrote half a dozen long cantos on Happiness. Montesquieu caught and held the ear of the town by *The Spirit of Laws* (1748), and Helvétius was acute enough to perceive that speculation upon society would be the great durable interest of his time.[103] He at once set to

work, and this time he set to work without hurry. In 1751 he threw up his place as farmer-general, and with it an income of between two or three thousand pounds a year,[104] and he then devoted himself for the next seven years to the concoction of a work that was designed to bring him immortal glory. "Helvétius sweated a long time to write a single chapter," if we may believe one of his intimates. He would compose and recompose a passage a score of times. More facile writers looked at him with amazement in his country-house, ruminating for whole mornings on a single page, and pacing his room for hours to kindle his ideas, or to strike out some curious form of expression.[105] The circle of his friends in Paris amused themselves in watching his attempts to force the conversation into the channel of the question that happened to occupy him for the moment. They gave him the satisfaction of discussion, and then they drew him to express his own views. "Then," says Marmontel, "he threw himself into the subject with warmth — as simple, as natural, as sincere as he is systematic and sophistic in his works. Nothing is less like the ingenuousness of his character and ordinary life, than the artificial and premeditated simplicity of his works. Helvétius was the very opposite in his character of what he professes to believe; he was liberal, generous, unostentatious, and benevolent."[106]

As it happens, there is a very different picture in one of Diderot's writings. While Diderot was on a journey he fell in with a lady who knew Helvétius's country. "She told us that the philosopher at his country seat was the unhappiest of men. He is surrounded by peasants and by neighbours who hate him. They break the windows of his mansion; they ravage his property at night; they cut his trees, and break down his fences. He dares not sally out to shoot a rabbit without an escort. You will ask me why all this? It comes of an unbridled jealousy about his game. His predecessors kept the estate in order with a couple of men and a couple of guns. Helvétius has four-and-twenty, and yet he cannot guard his property. The

men have a small premium for every poacher that they catch, and they resort to every possible vexation in order to multiply their sorry profit. They are, for that matter, no better than so many poachers who draw wages. The border of his woods was peopled with the unfortunate wretches who had been driven from their homes into pitiful hovels. It is these repeated acts of tyranny that have raised up against him enemies of every kind, and all the more insolent, as Madame N. said, for having found out that the good philosopher is a trifle pusillanimous. I cannot see what he has gained by such a way of managing his property; he is alone on it, he is hated, he is in a constant state of fright. Ah, how much wiser our good Madame Geoffrin, when she said of a trial that tormented her: 'Finish my case. They want my money? I have some; give them money. And what can I do better with money than buy tranquillity with it?' In Helvétius's place, I should have said: 'They kill a few hares, or a few rabbits; let them kill. The poor creatures have no shelter save my woods, let them remain there.'"[107]

On the other hand, there are well-attested stories of Helvétius's munificence. There is one remarkable testimony to his wide renown for good-nature. After the younger Pretender had been driven out of France, he had special reasons on some occasion for visiting Paris. He wrote to Helvétius that he had heard of him as a man of the greatest probity and honour in France, and that to Helvétius, therefore, he would trust himself. Helvétius did not refuse the dangerous compliment, and he concealed the prince for two years in his house.[108] He was as benevolent where his vanity was less pleasantly flattered. More than one man of letters, including Marivaux, was indebted to him for a yearly pension, and his house was as open to the philosophic tribe as Holbach's. Morellet has told us that the conversation was not so good and so consecutive as it was at the Baron's. "The mistress of the house, drawing to her side the people who pleased her best, and not choosing the worst of the company, rather broke the party up.

She was no fonder of philosophy than Madame Holbach was fond of it; but the latter, by remaining in a corner without saying a word, or else chatting in a low voice with her friends, was in nobody's way; whereas Madame Helvétius, with her beauty, her originality, and her piquant turn of nature, threw out anything like philosophic discussion. Helvétius had not the art of sustaining or animating it. He used to take one of us to a window, open some question that he had in hand, and try to draw out either some argument for his own view or some objection to it, for he was always composing his book in society. Or more frequently still, he would go out shortly after dinner to the opera or elsewhere, leaving his wife to do the honours of the house."[109] In spite of all this, Helvétius's social popularity became considerable. This, however, followed his attainment of celebrity, for when *L'Esprit* was published, Diderot scarcely met him twice in a year, and D'Alembert's acquaintance with him was of the slightest. And there must, we should suppose, have been some difficulty in cordially admitting even a penitent member of the abhorred class of farmers-general among the esoteric group of the philosophic opposition. There was much point in Turgot's contemptuous question, why he should be thankful to a declaimer like Helvétius, who showers vehement insults and biting sarcasms on governments in general, and then makes it his business to send to Frederick the Great a whole colony of revenue clerks. It was the stringent proceedings against his book that brought to Helvétius both vogue with the public and sympathy from the Encyclopædic circle.

To us it is interesting to know that Helvétius had a great admiration for England. Holbach, as we have already seen (above, vol. i. p. 270), did not share this, and he explained his friend's enthusiasm by the assumption that what Helvétius really saw in our free land was the persecution that his book had drawn upon him in France.[110] Horace Walpole, in one of his letters, announced to Sir Horace Mann that Helvétius was coming to England,

bringing two Miss Helvétiuses with fifty thousand pounds a-piece, to bestow on two immaculate members of our most august and incorruptible senate, if he could find two in this virtuous age who would condescend to accept his money. "Well," he adds, in a spirit of sensible protest against these unprofitable international comparisons, "we may be dupes to French follies, but they are ten times greater fools to be the dupes of our virtues."[111] Gibbon met Helvétius (1763), and found him a sensible man, an agreeable companion, and the worthiest creature in the world, besides the merits of having a pretty wife and a hundred thousand livres a year. Warburton was invited to dine with him at Lord Mansfield's, but he could not bring himself to countenance a professed patron of atheism, a rascal, and a scoundrel.[112]

Let us turn to the book which had the honour of bringing all this censure upon its author. Whether vanity was or was not Helvétius's motive, the vanity of an author has never accounted for the interest of his public, and we may be sure that neither those who approved, nor those who abhorred, would have been so deeply and so universally stirred, unless they had felt that he touched great questions at the very quick. And, first, let a word be said as to the form of his book.

Grimm was certainly right in saying that a man must be without taste or sense to find either the morality or the colouring of Diderot in *L'Esprit*. It is tolerably clear that Helvétius had the example of Fontenelle before his eyes — Fontenelle, who had taught astronomical systems in the forms of elegant literature, and of whom it was said that *il nous enjôle à la vérité*, he coaxes us to the truth. *L'Esprit* is perhaps the most readable book upon morals that ever was written, for persons who do not care that what they read shall be scientifically true. Hume, who, by the way, had been invited by Helvétius to translate the book into English, wrote to Adam Smith that it was worth reading, not for its philosophy, which he did not highly value, but for its agreeable composition.[113] Helvétius intended that it should be this, and

accordingly he stuffed it with stories and anecdotes. Many of them are very poor, many are inapposite, some are not very decent, others are spoiled in telling, but still stories and anecdotes they remain, and they carry a light-minded reader more or less easily from page to page and chapter to chapter. But an ingenuous student of ethics who should take Helvétius seriously, could hardly be reconciled by lively anecdotes to what, in his particular formula, seems a most depressing doctrine. Madame Roland read the celebrated book in her romantic girlhood, and her impression may be taken for that of most generous natures. "Helvétius made me wretched: he annihilated the most ravishing illusions; he showed me everywhere repulsive self-interest. Yet what sagacity!" she continues. "I persuaded myself that Helvétius painted men such as they had become in the corruption of society: I judged that it was good to feed one's self on such an author, in order to be able to frequent what is called the world, without being its dupe. But I took good care not to adopt his principles, merely in order to know man properly so-called. I felt myself capable of a generosity which he never recognises. With what delight I confronted his theories with the great traits in history, and the virtues of the heroes that history has immortalised."[114]

We have ventured to say that *L'Esprit* contained the one principle capable of supplying such a system of thinking about society as would have taught the French of that time in what direction to look for reforms. There is probably no instance in literature of a writer coming so close to a decisive body of salutary truth, and then losing himself in the by-ways of the most repulsive paradox that a perverse ingenuity could devise. We are able to measure how grievous was this miscarriage by reflecting that the same instrument which Helvétius actually held in his hand, but did not know how to use, was taken from him by a man of genius in another country, and made to produce reforms that saved England from a convulsion. Nobody

pretends that Helvétius discovered Utilitarianism. Hume's name, for instance, occurs too often in his pages for even the author himself to have dreamed that his principle of utility was a new invention of his own. It would, as Mill has said, imply ignorance of the history of philosophy and of general literature not to be aware that in all ages of philosophy one of its schools has been utilitarian, not only from the time of Epicurus, but long before. But what is certain, and what would of itself be enough to entitle Helvétius to consideration, is that from Helvétius the idea of general utility as the foundation of morality was derived by that strong and powerful English thinker, who made utilitarianism the great reforming force of legislation and the foundation of jurisprudence. Bentham himself distinctly avowed the source of his inspiration.[115]

A fatal discredit fastened upon a book which yet had in it so much of the root of the matter, from the unfortunate circumstance that Helvétius tacked the principle of utility on to the very crudest farrago to be found in the literature of psychology. What happened, then, was that Rousseau swept into the field with a hollow version of a philosophy of reform, so eloquently, loftily, and powerfully enforced as to carry all before it. The democracy of sentimentalism took the place that ought to have been filled in the literature of revolutionary preparation by the democracy of utility. Rousseau's fiction of the Sovereignty of the People was an arbitrary and intrinsically sterile rendering of the real truth in Helvétius's ill-starred book.

To establish the proper dependence of laws upon one another, says Helvétius, "it is indispensable to be able to refer them all to a single principle, such as that of *the Utility of the Public, that is to say, of the greatest number of men submitted to the same form of government: a principle of which no one realises the whole extent and fertility; a principle that contains all Morality and Legislation*."[116]

A man is just when all his actions tend to the public good. “To be virtuous, it is necessary to unite nobleness of soul with an enlightened understanding. Whoever combines these gifts conducts himself by *the compass of public utility*. This utility is the principle of all human virtues, and the foundation of all legislations. It ought to inspire the legislator, and to force the nations to submit to his laws.”[117]

The principle of public utility is invariable, though it is pliable in its application to all the different positions in which, in their succession, a nation may find itself.[118]

The public interest is that of the greatest number, and this is the foundation on which the principles of sound morality ought invariably to rest.[119]

These extracts, and extracts in the same sense might easily be multiplied, show us the basis on which Helvétius believed himself to be building. Why did Bentham raise upon it a fabric of such value to mankind, while Helvétius covered it with useless paradox? The answer is that Bentham approached the subject from the side of a practical lawyer, and proceeded to map out the motives and the actions of men in a systematic and objective classification, to which the principle of utility gave him the key. Helvétius, on the other hand, instead of working out the principle, that actions are good or bad according as they do or do not serve the public interest of the greatest number, contented himself with reiterating in as many ways as possible the proposition that self-love fixes our measure of virtue. The next thing to do, after settling utility as the standard of virtue, and defining interest as a term applied to whatever can procure us pleasures and deliver us from pains,[120] was clearly to do what Bentham did, — to marshal pleasures and pains in logical array. Instead of this, Helvétius, starting from the proposition that “to judge is to feel,” launched out into a complete theory of human character, which laboured under at least two fatal defects.

First, it had no root in a contemplation of the march of collective humanity, and second, it considered only the purely egoistic impulses, to the exclusion of the opposite half of human tendencies. Apart from these radical deficiencies, Helvétius fell headlong into a fallacy which has been common enough among the assailants of the principle of utility; namely, of confounding the standard of conduct with its motive, and insisting that because utility is the test of virtue, therefore the prospect of self-gratification is the only inducement that makes men prefer virtue to vice.

This was what Madame du Deffand called telling everybody's secret. We approve conduct in proportion as it conduces to our interest. Friendship, *esprit-de-corps*, patriotism, humanity, are names for qualities that we prize more or less highly in proportion as they come more or less close to our own happiness; and the scale of our preferences is in the inverse ratio of the number of those who benefit by the given act. If it affects the whole of humanity or of our country, our approval is less warmly stirred than if it were an act specially devoted to our own exclusive advantage. If you want therefore to reach men, and to shape their conduct for the public good, you must affect them through their pleasures and pains.

To this position, which roused a universal indignation that amazed the author, there is no doubt a true side. It is worth remembering, for instance, that all penal legislation, in so far as deterrent and not merely vindictive, assumes in all who come whether actually or potentially within its sphere, the very doctrine that covered Helvétius with odium. And there is more to be said than this. As M. Charles Comte has expressed it: If the strength with which we resent injury were not in the ratio of the personal risk that we run, we should hardly have the means of self-preservation; and if the acts which injure the whole of humanity gave us pain equal to that of acts that injure us directly, we should be of all beings the most miserable, for we should be incessantly tormented by conduct that we should be powerless to turn aside.

And again, if the benefits of which we are personally the object did not inspire in us a more lively gratitude than those which we spread over all mankind, we should probably experience few preferences, and extend few preferences to others, and in that case egoism would grow to its most overwhelming proportions.[121]

This aspect of Helvétius's doctrine, however, is one of those truths which is only valid when taken in connection with a whole group of different truths, and it was exactly that way of asserting a position, in itself neither indefensible nor unmeaning, which left the position open to irresistible attack. Helvétius's errors had various roots, and may be set forth in as many ways. The most general account of it is that even if he had insisted on making Self-love the strongest ingredient in our judgment of conduct, he ought at least to have given some place to Sympathy. For, though it is possible to contend that sympathy is only an indirect kind of self-love, or a shadow cast by self-love, still it is self-love so transformed as to imply a wholly different set of convictions, and to require a different name.

L'Esprit is one of the most striking instances in literature of the importance of care in choosing the right way of presenting a theory to the world. It seems as if Helvétius had taken pains to surround his doctrine with everything that was most likely to warn men away from it. For example, he begins a chapter of cardinal importance with the proposition that personal interest is the only motive that could impel a man to generous actions. "It is as impossible for him to love good for good's sake as evil for the sake of evil." The rest of the chapter consists of illustrations of this; and what does the reader suppose that they are? The first is Brutus, of all the people in the world. He sacrificed his son for the salvation of Rome, because his passion for his country was stronger than his passion as a father; and this passion for his country, "enlightening him as to the public interest," made him see what a service his rigorous example would be to the state. The other instances of

the chapter point the same moral, that true virtue consists in suppressing inducements to gratify domestic or friendly feeling, when that gratification is hostile to the common weal.[122]

It may be true that the ultimate step in a strictly logical analysis reduces the devotion of the hero or the martyr to a deliberate preference for the course least painful to himself, because religion or patriotism or inborn magnanimity have made self-sacrifice the least painful course to him. But to call this heroic mood by the name of self-love, is to single out what is absolutely the most unimportant element in the transaction, and to insist on thrusting it under the onlooker's eye as the vital part of the matter. And it involves the most perverse kind of distortion. For the whole issue and difference between the virtuous man and the vicious man turns, not at all upon the fact that each behaves in the way that habit has made least painful to him, but upon the fact that habit has made selfishness painful to the first, and self-sacrifice painful to the second; that self-love has become in the first case transformed into an overwhelming interest in the good of others, and in the second not so. Was there ever a greater perversity than to talk of self-interest, when you mean beneficence, or than to insist that because beneficence has become bound up with a man's self-love, therefore beneficence *is* nothing but self-love in disguise? As if the fruit or the flower not only depends on a root as one of the conditions among others of its development, but is itself actually the root! Apart from the error in logic, what an error in rhetoric, to single out the formula best calculated to fill a doctrine with odious associations, and then to make that formula the most prominent feature in the exposition. Without any gain in clearness or definiteness or firmness, the reader is deliberately misled towards a form that is exactly the opposite of that which Helvétius desired him to accept.

In other ways Helvétius takes trouble to wound the generous sensibility and affront the sense of his public. Nothing can be at once more

scandalously cynical and more crude than a passage intended to show that, if we examine the conduct of women of disorderly life from the political point of view, they are in some respects extremely useful to the public. That desire to please, which makes such a woman go to the draper, the milliner, and the dressmaker, draws an infinite number of workmen from indigence. The virtuous women, by giving alms to mendicants and criminals, are far less wisely advised by their religious directors than the other women by their desire to please; the latter nourish useful citizens, while the former, who at the best are useless, are often even downright enemies to the nation.[123] All this is only a wordy transcript of Mandeville's coarse sentences about "the sensual courtier that sets no limits to his luxury, and the fickle strumpet that invents new fashions every week." We cannot wonder that all people who were capable either of generous feeling or comprehensive thinking turned aside even from truth, when it was mixed in this amalgam of destructive sophistry and cynical illustration.

We can believe how the magnanimous youth of Madame Roland and others was discouraged by pages sown with mean anecdote. Helvétius tells us, with genuine zest, of Parmenio saying to Philotas at the court of Alexander the Great— "My son, make thyself small before Alexander; contrive for him now and again the pleasure of setting thee right; and remember that it is only to thy seeming inferiority that thou wilt owe his friendship." The King of Portugal charged a certain courtier to draw up a despatch on an affair with which he had himself dealt. Comparing the two despatches, the King found the courtier's much the better of the two: the courtier makes a profound reverence, and hastens to take leave of his friends: "*It is all over with me*," he said, "*the King has found out that I have more brains than he has*."[124] Only mediocrity succeeds in the world. "Sir," said a father to his son, "you are getting on in the world, and you suppose you must be a person of great merit. To lower your pride, know to what

qualities you owe this success: you were born without vices, without virtues, without character; your knowledge is scanty, your intelligence is narrow. Ah, what claims you have, my son, to the goodwill of the world."[125]

It lies beyond the limits of our task to enter into a discussion of Helvétius's transgressions in the region of speculative ethics, from any dogmatic point of view. Their nature is tolerably clear. Helvétius looked at man individually, as if each of us came into the world naked of all antecedent predispositions, and independent of the medium around us. Next, he did not see that virtue, justice, and the other great words of moral science denote qualities that are directly related to the fundamental constitution of human character. As Diderot said,[126] he never perceived it to be possible to find in our natural requirements, in our existence, in our organisation, in our sensibility, a fixed base for the idea of what is just and unjust, virtuous and vicious. He clung to the facts that showed the thousand different shapes in which justice and injustice clothed themselves; but he closed his eyes on the nature of man, in which he would have recognised their character and origin. Again, although his book was expressly written to show that only good laws can form virtuous men, and that all the art of the legislator consists in forcing men, through the sentiment of self-love, to be just to one another,[127] yet Helvétius does not perceive the difficulty of assuming in the moralising legislator a suppression of self-love which he will not concede to the rest of mankind. The crucial problem of political constitutions is to counteract the selfishness of a governing class. Helvétius vaulted over this difficulty by imputing to a legislator that very quality of disinterestedness whose absence in the bulk of the human race he made the fulcrum of his whole moral system.[128]

Into this field of criticism it is not, I repeat, our present business minutely to enter. The only question for us, attempting to study the history of opinion, is what Helvétius meant by his paradoxes, and how they came

into his mind. No serious writer, least of all a Frenchman in the eighteenth century, ever sets out with anything but such an intention for good, as is capable of respectable expression. And we ask ourselves what good end Helvétius proposed to himself. Of what was he thinking when he perpetrated so singular a misconstruction of his own meaning as that inversion of beneficence into self-love of which we have spoken? We can only explain it in one way. In saying that it is impossible to love good for good's sake, Helvétius was thinking of the theologians. Their doctrine that man is predisposed to love evil for evil's sake, removes conduct from the sphere of rational motive, as evinced in the ordinary course of human experience. Helvétius met this by contending that both in good and bad conduct men are influenced by their interest and not by mystic and innate predisposition either to good or to evil. He sought to bring morals and human conduct out of the region of arbitrary and superstitious assumption, into the sphere of observation. He thought he was pursuing a scientific, as opposed to a theological spirit, by placing interest at the foundation of conduct, both as matter of fact and of what ought to be the fact, instead of placing there the love of God, or the action of grace, or the authority of the Church.

We may even say that Helvétius shows a positive side, which is wanting in the more imposing names of the century. Here, for instance, is a passage which in spite of its inadequateness of expression, contains an unmistakable germ of true historical appreciation:— "However stupid we may suppose the Peoples to be, it is certain that, being enlightened by their interests, it was not without motives that they adopted the customs that we find established among some of them. The bizarre nature of these customs is connected, then, with the diversity of interests among these Peoples. In fact, if they have always understood, in a confused way, by the name of virtue the desire of public happiness; if they have in consequence given the name

of good to actions that are useful to the country; and if the idea of utility has always been privately associated with the idea of virtue, then we may be sure that their most ridiculous, and even their most cruel, customs have always had for their foundation the real or seeming utility of the public good."[129]

If we contrast this with the universal fashion among Helvétius's friends, of denouncing the greater portion of the past history of the race, we cannot but see that, crude as is the language of such a passage, it contains the all-important doctrine which Voltaire, Rousseau, and Diderot alike ignored, that the phenomena of the conduct of mankind, even in its most barbarous phases, are capable of an intelligible explanation, in terms of motive that shall be related to their intellectual forms, exactly as the motives of the most polished society are related to the intellectual forms of such a society. There are not many passages in all the scores of volumes written in France in the eighteenth century on the origin of society where there is such an approach as this to the modern view.

Helvétius's position was that of a man searching for a new basis for morals. It was hardly possible for any one in that century to look to religion for such a base, and least of all was it possible to Helvétius. "It is fanaticism," he says in an elaborately wrought passage, "that puts arms into the hands of Christian princes; it orders Catholics to massacre heretics; it brings out upon the earth again those tortures that were invented by such monsters as Phalaris, as Busiris, as Nero; in Spain it piles and lights up the fires of the Inquisition, while the pious Spaniards leave their ports and sail across distant seas, to plant the Cross and spread desolation in America. Turn your eyes to north or south, to east or west; on every side you see the consecrated knife of Religion raised against the breasts of women, of children, of old men, and the earth all smoking with the blood of victims immolated to false gods or to the Supreme Being, and presenting one vast,

sickening, horrible charnel-house of intolerance. Now what virtuous man, what Christian, if his tender soul is filled with the divine unction that exhales from the maxims of the Gospel, if he is sensible of the cries of the unhappy and the outcast, and has sometimes wiped away their tears — what man could fail at such a sight to be touched with compassion for humanity, and would not use all his endeavour to found probity, not on principles so worthy of respect as those of religion, but on principles less easily abused, such as those of personal interest would be?"[130]

This, then, is the point best worth seizing in a criticism of Helvétius. The direction of morality by religion had proved a failure. Helvétius, as the organ of reaction against asceticism and against mysticism, appealed to positive experience, and to men's innate tendency to seek what is pleasurable and to avoid what is painful. The scientific imperfection of his attempt is plain; but that, at any rate, is what the attempt signified in his own mind.

The same feeling for social reform inspired the second great paradox of *L'Esprit*. This is to the effect that of all the sources of intellectual difference between one man and another, organisation is the least influential. Intellectual differences are due to diversity of circumstance and to variety in education. It is not felicity of organisation that makes a great man. There is nobody, in whom passion, interest, education, and favourable chance, could not have surmounted all the obstacles of an unpromising nature; and there is no great man who, in the absence of passion, interest, education, and certain chances, would not have been a blockhead, in spite of his happier organisation. It is only in the moral region that we ought to seek the true cause of inequality of intellect. Genius is no singular gift of nature. Genius is common; it is only the circumstances proper to develop it that are rare. The man of genius is simply the product of the circumstances in which he is placed. The inequality in intelligence (*esprit*) that we observe among

men, depends on the government under which they live, on the times in which their destiny has fallen, on the education that they have received, on the strength of their desire to achieve distinction, and finally on the greatness and fecundity of the ideas which they happen to make the object of their meditations.[131]

Here again it would be easy to show how many qualifications are needed to rectify this egregious overstatement of propositions that in themselves contain the germ of a wholesome doctrine. Diderot pointed out some of the principal causes of Helvétius's errors, summing them up thus: "The whole of this third discourse seems to imply a false calculation, into which the author has failed to introduce all the elements that have a right to be there, and to estimate the elements that are there at their right value. He has not seen the insurmountable barrier that separates a man destined by nature for a given function, from a man who only brings to that function industry, interest, and attention."[132] In a work published after his death (1774), and entitled *De l'Homme*, Helvétius re-stated at greater length, and with a variety of new illustrations, this exaggerated position. Diderot wrote an elaborate series of minute notes in refutation of it, taking each chapter point by point, and his notes are full of acute and vigorous criticism.[133] Every reader will perceive the kind of answers to which the proposition that character is independent of organisation lies open. Yet here, as in his paradox about self-love, Helvétius was looking, and looking, moreover, in the right direction, for a rational principle of moral judgment, moral education, and moral improvement. Of the two propositions, though equally erroneous in theory, it was certainly less mischievous in practice to pronounce education and institutions to be stronger than original predisposition than to pronounce organisation to be stronger than education and institutions. It was all-important at that moment in France to draw people's attention to the influence of institutions on character; to do that

was both to give one of the best reasons for a reform in French institutions, and also to point to the spirit in which such a reform should be undertaken. If Helvétius had contented himself with saying that, whatever may be the force of organisation in exceptional natures, yet in persons of average organisation these predispositions are capable of being indefinitely modified by education, by laws, and by institutions, then he would not only have said what could not be disproved, but he would have said as much as his own object required. William Godwin drew one of the most important chapters of his once famous treatise on *Political Justice* from Helvétius, but what Helvétius exaggerated into a paradox which nobody in his senses could seriously accept, Godwin expressed as a rational half-truth, without which no reformer in education or institutions could fairly think it worth while to set to work.[134]

The reader of Benjamin Constant's *Adolphe*, that sombre little study of a miserable passion, may sometimes be reminded of Helvétius. It begins with the dry surprise of youth at the opening world, for we need time, he says, to accustom ourselves to the human race, such as affectation, vanity, cowardice, interest have made it. Then we soon learn only to be surprised at our old surprise; we find ourselves very well off in our new conditions, just as we come to breathe freely in a crowded theatre, though on entering it we were almost stifled. Yet the author of this parching sketch of the distractions of an egoism that just fell short of being complete, suddenly flashes on us the unexpected but penetrating and radiant moral, *La grande question dans la vie, c'est la douleur que l'on cause* — the great question in life is the pain that we strike into the lives of others. We are not seldom refreshed, when in the midst of Helvétius's narrowest grooves, by some similar breath from the wider air. Among the host of sayings, true, false, trivial, profound, which are scattered over the pages of Helvétius, is one subtle and far-reaching sentence, which made a strong impression upon Bentham. "*In*

order to love mankind," he writes, "*we must expect little from them*." This might, on the lips of a cynic, serve for a formula of that kind of misanthropy which is not more unamiable than it is unscientific. But in the mouth of Helvétius it was a plea for considerateness, for indulgence, and, above all, it was meant for an inducement to patience and sustained endeavour in all dealings with masses of men in society. "Every man," he says, "so long as his passions do not obscure his reason, will always be the more indulgent in proportion as he is enlightened." He knows that men are what they must be, that all hatred against them is unjust, that a fool produces follies just as a wild shrub produces sour berries, that to insult him is to reproach the oak for bearing acorns instead of olives.[135] All this is as wise and humane as words can be so, and it really represents the aim and temper of Helvétius's teaching. Unfortunately for him and for his generation, his grasp was feeble and unsteady. He had not the gift of accurate thinking, and his book is in consequence that which, of all the books of the eighteenth century, unites most of wholesome truth with most of repellent error.

CHAPTER VI. HOLBACH'S SYSTEM OF NATURE.

THE *SYSTEM OF Nature* was published in 1770, eight years before the death of Voltaire and of Rousseau, and it gathered up all the scattered explosives of the criticism of the century into one thundering engine of revolt and destruction. It professed to be the posthumous work of Mirabaud, who had been secretary to the Academy. This was one of the common literary frauds of the time. Its real author was Holbach. It is too systematic and coherently compacted to be the design of more than one man, and it is too systematic also for that one man to have been Diderot, as has been so often assumed. At the same time there are good reasons for believing that not only much of its thought, but some of the pages, were the direct work of Diderot. The latest editor of the heedless philosopher has certainly done right in placing among his miscellanea the declamatory apostrophe which sums up the teachings of this remorseless book. The rumour imputing the authorship to Diderot was so common, and Diderot himself was so disquieted by it, that he actually hastened away from Paris to his native Langres and to the Baths of Bourbonne, in order to be ready to cross the frontier at the first hint of a warrant being out against him.[136] Diderot has recorded his admiration of his friend's work. "I am disgusted," he said, "with the modern fashion of mixing up incredulity and superstition. What I like is a philosophy that is clear, definite, and frank, such as you have in the *System of Nature*. The author is not an atheist in one page, and a deist in another. His philosophy is all of one piece."[137]

No book has ever produced a more widespread shock. Everybody insisted on reading it, and almost everybody was terrified. It suddenly revealed to men, like the blaze of lightning to one faring through darkness, the formidable shapes, the unfamiliar sky, the sinister landscape, into which

the wanderings of the last fifty years had brought them unsuspecting. They had had half a century of such sharp intellectual delight as had not been known throughout any great society in Europe since the death of Michael Angelo, and had perhaps north of the Alps never been known at all. And now it seemed to many of them, as they turned over the pages of Holbach's book, as if they stood face to face with the devil of the mediæval legend, come to claim their souls. Satire of Job and David, banter about Joshua's massacres and Solomon's concubines, invective against blind pastors of blinder flocks, zeal to place Newton on the throne of Descartes and Locke upon the pedestal of Malebranche, wishes that the last Jansenist might be strangled in the bowels of the last Jesuit — all this had given zest and savour to life. In the midst of their high feast, Holbach pointed to the finger of their own divinity, Reason, writing on the wall the appalling judgments that there is no God; that the universe is only matter in spontaneous movement; and, most grievous word of all, that what men call their souls die with the death of the body, as music dies when the strings are broken.

Galiani, the witty Neapolitan, who had so many good friends in the philosophic circle, anticipated the well-known phrase of a writer of our own day. "The author of the *System of Nature*," he said, "is the Abbé Terrai of metaphysics: he makes deductions, suspensions of payment, and causes the very Bankruptcy of knowledge, of pleasure, and of the human mind. But you will tell me that, after all, there were too many rotten securities; that the account was too heavily overdrawn; that there was too much worthless paper on the market. That is true, too, and that is why the crisis has come."[138] Goethe, then a student at Strasburg, has told us what horror and alarm the *System of Nature* brought into the circle there. "But we could not conceive," he says, "how such a book could be dangerous. It came to us so gray, so Cimmerian, so corpse-like, that we could hardly endure its

presence; we shuddered before it as if it had been a spectre. It struck us as the very quintessence of musty age, savourless, repugnant."[139]

If this was the light in which the book appeared to the young man who was soon to be the centre of German literature, the brilliant veteran who had for two generations been the centre of the literature of France was both shocked by the audacity of the new treatise, and alarmed at the peril in which it involved the whole Encyclopædic brotherhood, with the Patriarch at their head. Voltaire had no sooner read the *System of Nature* than he at once snatched up his ever-ready pen and plunged into refutation.[140] At the same time he took care that the right persons should hear what he had done. He wrote to his old patron and friend Richelieu, that it would be a great kindness if he would let the King know that the abused Voltaire had written an answer to the book that all the world was talking about. I think, he says, that it is always a good thing to uphold the doctrine of the existence of a God who punishes and rewards; society has need of such an opinion. There is a curious disinterestedness in the notion of Lewis the Fifteenth and Richelieu, two of the wickedest men of their time, being anxious for the demonstration of a *Dieu vengeur*. Voltaire at least had a very keen sense of the meaning of a court that rewarded and punished. The author of the *System of Nature*, he wrote to Grimm, ought to have felt that he was undoing his friends, and making them hateful in the eyes of the king and the court.[141] This came true in the case of the great philosopher-king himself. Frederick of Prussia was offended by a book which spared political superstitions as little as theological dogma, and treated kings as boldly as it treated priests. Though keenly occupied in watching the war then waging between Russia and Turkey, and already revolving the partition of Poland, he found time to compose a defence of theism. 'Tis a good sign, Voltaire said to him, when a king and a plain man think alike: their interests are

often so hostile, that when their ideas do agree, they must certainly be right.[142]

The philosophic meaning of Holbach's propositions was never really seized by Voltaire. He is, as has been justly said, the representative of ordinary common sense which, with all its declamations and its appeals to the feelings, is wholly without weight or significance as against a philosophic way of considering things, however humble the philosophy may be.[143] He hardly took more pains to understand Holbach than Johnson took to understand Berkeley. In truth it was a characteristic of Voltaire always to take the social, rather than the philosophic view of the great issues of the theistic controversy. One day, when present at a discussion as to the existence of a deity, in which the negative was being defended with much vivacity, he astonished the company by ordering the servants to leave the room, and then proceeding to lock the door. "Gentlemen," he explained, "I do not wish my valet to cut my throat to-morrow morning." It was not the truth of the theistic belief in itself that Voltaire prized, but its supposed utility as an assistant to the police. D'Alembert, on the other hand, viewed the dispute as a matter of disinterested speculation. "As for the existence of a supreme intelligence," he wrote to Frederick the Great, "I think that those who deny it advance far more than they can prove, and scepticism is the only reasonable course." He goes on to say, however, that experience invincibly proves both the materiality of the soul, and a material deity — like that which Mr. Mill did not repudiate — of limited powers, and dependent on fixed conditions.[144]

Let us now turn to the book itself. And first, as to its author. The reader of the *New Heloïsa* will remember that the heroine, after her repentance and her marriage, has only one chagrin in the world; that is the blank disbelief of her husband in the two great mysteries of a Supreme Being and another world. Wolmar, the husband, has always been supposed to stand for

Rousseau's version of Holbach, and Holbach would hardly have complained of the portrait. The Wolmar of the novel is benevolent, active, patient, tranquil, friendly, and trustful. The nicely combined conjunction of the play of circumstance with the action of men pleases him, just as the fine symmetry of a statue or the skilful contrivance of dramatic effects would please him. If he has any dominant passion, it is a passion for observation; he delights in reading the hearts of men.[145]

All this seems to have been as true of the real Holbach as of the imaginary Wolmar. We have already seen him as the intimate friend and constant host of Diderot. He was one of the best-informed men of his time (1723-89). He had an excellent library, a collection of pictures, and a valuable cabinet of natural history; and his poorer friends were as freely welcome to the use of all of them as the richest. His manners were cheerful, courteous, and easy; he was a model of simplicity, and kindliness was written on every feature. His hospitality won him the well-known nickname of the maître d'hôtel of philosophy, and his house was jestingly called the Café de l'Europe. On Sundays and Thursdays, without prejudice to other days, from ten to a score of men of letters and eminent foreign visitors, including Hume, Wilkes, Shelburne, Garrick, Franklin, Priestley, used to gather round his good dishes and excellent wine. It was noted, as a mark of the attractiveness of the company, that the guests, who came at two in the afternoon, constantly remained until as late as seven and eight in the evening. To one of those guests, who afterwards became the powerful enemy of the Encyclopædic group, the gaiety, the irreverence, the hardihood of speculation and audacity of discourse, were all as gall and wormwood. Rousseau found their atheistic sallies offensive beyond endurance. Their hard rationalism was odious to the great emotional dreamer, and after he had quarrelled with them all, he transformed his own impressions of the dreariness of atheism into the passionate complaint of

Julie. “Conceive the torment of living in retirement with the man who shares our existence, and yet cannot share the hope that makes existence dear; of never being able with him either to bless the works of God, or to speak of the happy future that is promised us by the goodness of God; of seeing him, while doing good on every side, still insensible to everything that makes the delight of doing good; of watching him, by the most bizarre of contradictions, think with the impious, and yet live like a Christian. Think of Julie walking with her husband; the one admiring in the rich and splendid robe of the earth the handiwork and the bounteous gifts of the author of the universe; the other seeing nothing in it all save a fortuitous combination, the product of blind force! Alas! she cries, the great spectacle of nature, for us so glorious, so animated, is dead in the eyes of the unhappy Wolmar, and in that great harmony of being where all speaks of God in accents so mild and so persuasive, he only perceives eternal silence.”[146]

Yet it is fair to the author of this most eloquent Ignoratio Elenchi, to notice that he honestly fulfilled the object with which he professed to set out — namely, to show to both the religious and philosophical parties that their adversaries were capable of leading upright, useful, and magnanimous lives. Whether he would have painted the imaginary Wolmar so favourably if he could have foreseen what kind of book the real Holbach had in his desk, is perhaps doubtful. For Holbach’s opinions looked more formidable and sombre in the cold deliberateness of print than they had sounded amid the interruptions of lively discourse.

It is needless to say, to begin with, that the writer has the most marked of the philosophic defects of the school of the century. Perhaps we might put it more broadly, and call the disregard of historic opinion the natural defect of all materialistic speculation from Epicurus downwards.[147] Like all others of his school, Holbach has no perception nor sense of the necessity of an

explanation how the mental world came to be what it is, nor how men came to think and believe what they do think and believe. He gives them what he deems unanswerable reasons for changing their convictions, but he never dreams of asking himself in what elements of human character the older convictions had their root, and from what fitness for the conduct of life they drew the current of their sap. Yet unless this aspect of things had been well considered, his unanswerable reasons were sure to fall wide of the mark. Opinions, as men began to remember, after social movement had thrown the logical century into discredit, have a history as well as a logic. They are bound up with a hundred transmitted prepossessions, and they have become identified with a hundred social customs that are the most dearly cherished parts of men's lives. Nature had as much to do with the darkness of yesterday as with the light of to-day; she is as much the accomplice of superstition as she is the oracle of reason. It was because they forgot all this that Holbach's school now seem so shallow and superficial. The whole past was one long working of the mystery of iniquity. "The sum of the woes of the human race was not diminished — on the contrary, it was increased by its religions, by its governments, by its opinions, in a word, by all the institutions that *it was led to adopt* on the plea of ameliorating its lot."[148] *On lui fit adopter!* But who were the *on*, and how did they work? With what instruments and what fulcrum? Never was the convenience of this famous abstract substantive more fatally abused. And if religion, government, and opinion had all aggravated the miseries of the human race, what had lessened them? For the Encyclopædic school never attempted, as Rousseau did, to deny that the world had, as a matter of fact, advanced towards happiness. It was because the Holbachians looked on mankind as slaves held in an unaccountable bondage, which they must necessarily be eager to throw off, that their movement, after doing at the Revolution a certain

amount of good in a bad way, led at last to a mischievous reaction in favour of Catholicism.

Far more immediately significant than the philosophy of the *System of Nature* were the violence, directness, and pertinacity of its assault upon political government. Voltaire, as has so often been noticed, had always abstained from meddling with either the theory or the practical abuses of the national administration. All his shafts had been levelled at ecclesiastical superstition. Rousseau, indeed, had begun the most famous of his political speculations by crying that man, who was born free, is now everywhere in chains. But Rousseau was vague, abstract, and sentimental. In the *System of Nature* we have a clear presage of the trenchant and imperious invective which, twenty years after its publication, rang in all men's ears from the gardens of the Palais Royal and the benches of the Jacobins' Hall. The writer has plainly made up his mind that the time has at last come for dropping all the discreet machinery of apologue and parable, and giving to his words the edge of a sharpened sword. The vague disguises of political speculation, and the mannered reservations of a Utopia or New Atlantis, are exchanged for a passionate, biting, and loudly practical indictment. All over the world men are under the yoke of masters who neglect the instruction of their people, or only seek to cheat and deceive them. The sovereigns in every part of the globe are unjust, incapable, made effeminate by luxury, corrupted by flattery, depraved by license and impunity, destitute of talent, manners, or virtue. Indifferent to their duties, which they usually know nothing about, they are scarcely concerned for a single moment of the day with the well-being of their people; their whole attention is absorbed by useless wars, or by the desire to find at each instant new means of gratifying their insatiable rapacity. The state of society is a state of war between the sovereign and all the rest of its members. In every country alike the morality of the people is wholly neglected, and the one care of the

government is to render them timorous and wretched. The common man desires no more than bread; he wins it by the sweat of his brow; joyfully would he eat it, if the injustice of the government did not make it bitter in his mouth. By the insanity of governments, those who are swimming in plenty, without being any the happier for it, yet wring from the tiller of the soil the very fruits that his arms have won from it. Injustice, by reducing indigence to despair, drives it to seek in crime resources against the woes of life. An iniquitous government breeds despair in men's souls; its vexations depopulate the land, the fields remain untilled, famine, contagion, and pestilence stalk over the earth. Then, embittered by misery, men's minds begin to ferment and effervesce, and what inevitably follows is the overthrow of a realm.[149]

If France had been prosperous, all this would have passed for the empty declamation of an excited man of letters. As it was, such declamation only described, in language as accurate as it was violent and stinging, the real position of the country. In the urgency of a present material distress, men were not over-careful that the basis of the indictment should be laid in the principles of a sound historical philosophy of society. We can hardly wonder at it. What is interesting, and what we do not notice earlier in the century, is that in the *System of Nature* the revolt against the impotence of society, and the revolt against the omnipotence of God, made a firm coalition. That coalition came to a bloody end for the time, four-and-twenty years after Holbach's book proclaimed it, when the Committee of Public Safety despatched Hébert, and better men than Hébert, to the guillotine for being atheists. Atheism, as Robespierre assured them, was aristocratic.

Holbach's work may be said to spring from the doctrine that the social deliverance of man depends on his intellectual deliverance, and that the key to his intellectual deliverance is only to be found in the substitution of Naturalism for Theism. What he means by Naturalism we shall proceed

shortly to explain. The style, we may remark, notwithstanding the energy and coherence of the thought, is often diffuse and declamatory. Some one said of the *System of Nature*, that it contained at least four times too many words. Yet Voltaire, while professing extreme dislike of its doctrine, admitted that the writer had somehow caught the ear of the learned, of the ignorant, and of women. "He is often clear," said Voltaire, "and sometimes eloquent, yet he may justly be reproached with declamation, with repeating himself, and with contradicting himself, like all the rest of them."[150] Galiani made an over-subtle criticism on it, when he complained of the want of coolness and self-possession in the style, and then said that it looked as if the writer were pressed less to persuade other people than to persuade himself. This was a crude impression. Nobody can have any doubt of the writer's profound sincerity, or of his earnest desire to make proselytes. He knows his own mind, and hammers his doctrines out with a hard and iterative stroke that hits its mark. Yet his literary tone, in spite of its declamatory pitch, not seldom sinks into a drone. Holbach's contemporaries were in too fierce contact with the tusks and hooked claws of the Church, to have any mind for the rhythm of a champion's sentences or the turn of his periods. But now that the efforts of the heterodox have taught the Churches to be better Christians than they were a hundred years ago, we can afford to admit that Holbach is hardly more captivating in style, and not always more edifying in temper, than some of the Christian Fathers themselves.

What then is the system of Nature, and what is that Naturalism which is to replace the current faith in the deities outside of observable nature? The writer makes no pretence of feeling a tentative way towards an answer. From the very outset his spirit is that of dogmatic confidence. He is less a seeker than an expounder; less a philosopher than a preacher; and he boldly dismisses proof in favour of exhortation.

"Let man cease to search outside the world in which he dwells for beings who may procure him a happiness that nature refuses to grant; let him study that nature, let him learn her laws, and contemplate the energy and the unchanging fixity with which she acts; let him apply his discoveries to his own felicity, and submit in silence to laws from which nothing can withdraw him; let him consent to ignore the causes, surrounded as they are for him by an impenetrable veil; let him undergo without a murmur the decrees of universal force."

Science derived from experience is the source of all wise action. It is physical science (*la physique*), and experience, that man ought to consult in religion, morals, legislature, as well as in knowledge and the arts. It is by our senses that we are bound to universal nature; it is by our senses that we discover her secrets. The moment that we first experience them we fall into a void where our imagination leads us endlessly astray.

Movement is what establishes relations between our organs and external objects. Every object has laws of movement that are peculiar to itself. Everything in the universe is in movement; no part of nature is really at rest.[151]

Whence does nature receive this movement? From herself, since she is the great whole, outside of which consequently nothing can exist. Motion is a fashion of being which flows necessarily from the essence of matter; matter moves by its own energy; its motion is due to forces inherent in it; the variety of its movements, and of the phenomena resulting from them, comes from variation of the properties, the qualities, the combinations, originally found in the different primitive matters of which nature is the assemblage.

Whence came matter? Matter has existed from all eternity, and a motion is one of the inherent and constitutive qualities of matter; motion also has existed from eternity.

The abstract idea of matter must be decomposed. Instead of regarding matter as a unique existence, rude, passive, incapable of moving itself, of combining itself, we ought to look upon it as a Kind of existence, of which the various individual members comprising the Kind, in spite of their having some common properties, such as extension, divisibility, figure, etc., still ought not to be ranged in a single class, nor comprised in a single denomination.

What is nature's process? Continual movement. From the stone which is formed in the bowels of the earth by the intimate combination, as they approach one another, of analogous and similar molecules, up to the sun, that vast reservoir of heated particles that gives light to the firmament; from the numb oyster up to man — we observe an uninterrupted progression, a perpetual chain of combination and movements, from which there result beings that only differ among one another by the variety of their elementary matters, and of the combination and proportion of these elements. From this variety springs an infinite diversity of ways of existing and acting. In generation, nutrition, preservation, we can see nothing but different sorts of matter differently combined, each of them endowed with its own movements, each of them regulated by fixed laws that cause them to undergo the necessary changes.

Let us notice here three of the author's definitions. (1.) *Motion is an effort, by which a body changes or tends to change its place.* (2.) Of the ultimate composition of Matter, Holbach says nothing definite, though he assumes molecular movement as its first law. He contents himself, properly enough perhaps in view of the destination of his treatise, with a definition "relatively to us." Relatively to us, then, *Matter in general is all that affects our senses in any fashion whatever; and the qualities that we attribute to different kinds of matter, are founded on the different impressions that they produce on us*. (3.) "When I say that Nature produces an effect, I do not

mean to personify this Nature, which is an abstraction; I mean that the effect of which I am speaking is the necessary result of the properties of some one of those beings that compose the great whole under our eyes. Thus, when I say that Nature intends man to work for his own happiness, I mean by this that it is of the essence of a being who feels, thinks, wills, and acts, to work for his own happiness. By Essence I mean that which constitutes a being what it is, the sum of its properties, or the qualities according to which it exists and acts as it does."

All phenomena are necessary. No creature in the universe, in its circumstances and according to its given property, can act otherwise than as it does act. Fire necessarily burns whatever combustible matter comes within the sphere of its action. Man necessarily desires what either is, or seems to be, conducive to his comfort and wellbeing. There is no independent energy, no isolated cause, no detached activity, in a universe where all beings are incessantly acting on one another, and which is itself only one eternal round of movement, imparted and undergone, according to necessary laws. In a storm of dust raised by a whirlwind, in the most violent tempest that agitates the ocean, not a single molecule of dust or of water finds its place by *chance*; or is without an adequate cause for occupying the precise point where it is found. So, again, in the terrible convulsions that sometimes overthrow empires, there is not a single action, word, thought, volition, or passion in a single agent of such a revolution, whether he be a destroyer or a victim, which is not necessary, which does not act precisely as it must act, and which does not infallibly produce the effects that it is bound to produce, conformably to the place occupied by the given agent in the moral whirlwind.[152]

Order and disorder are abstract terms, and can have no existence in a Nature, where all is necessary and follows constant laws. Order is nothing more than necessity viewed relatively to the succession of actions. Disorder

in the case of any being is nothing more than its passage to a new order; to a succession of movements and actions of a different sort from those of which the given being was previously susceptible. Hence there can never be either monsters or prodigies, either marvels or miracles, in nature. By the same reasoning, we have no right to divide the workings of nature into those of Intelligence and those of Chance. Where all is necessary, Chance can mean nothing save the limitation of man's knowledge.

The writer next has a group of chapters (vi.-x.) on Man, his composition, relations, and destiny. The chief propositions are in rigorous accord with the general conceptions that have already been set forth. All that man does, and all that passes in him, are effects of the energy that is common to him with the other beings known to us. But, before a true and comprehensive idea of the unity of nature was possible to him, he was so seized by the variety and complication of his organism and its movements that it never came into his mind to realise that they existed in a chain of material necessity, binding him fast to all other forces and modes of being. Men think that they remedy their ignorance of things by inventing words; so they explained the working of matter, in man's case, by associating with matter a hypothetical substance, which is in truth much less intelligible than matter itself. They regarded themselves as double; a compound of matter and something else miraculously united with it, to which they give the name of *mind* or *soul*, and then they proudly looked on themselves as beings apart from the rest of creation. In plain truth, Mind is only an *occult force*, invented to explain occult qualities and actions, and really explaining nothing. By Mind they mean no more than the unknown cause of phenomena that they cannot explain naturally, just as the Red Indians believed that it was spirits who produced the terrible effects of gunpowder, and just as the ignorant of our own day believe in angels and demons. How can we figure to ourselves a form of being, which, though not matter, still acts on matter, without having

points of contact or analogy with it; and on the other hand itself receives the impulsions of matter, through the material organs that warn it of the presence of external objects? How can we conceive the union of body and soul, and how can this material body enclose, bind, constrain, determine a fugitive form of being, that escapes every sense? To resolve these difficulties by calling them mysteries, and to set them down as the effects of the omnipotence of a Being still more inconceivable than the human Soul itself, is merely a confession of absolute ignorance.

It is worth noticing that with the characteristic readiness of the French materialist school to turn metaphysical and psychological discussion to practical uses, Holbach discerned the immense new field which the materialist account of mind opened to the physician. “If people consulted experience instead of prejudice, medicine would furnish morality with the key of the human heart; and in curing the body, it would be often assured of curing the mind too.... The dogma of the spirituality of the soul has turned morality into a conjectural science, which does not in the least help us to understand the true way of acting on men’s motives.... Man will always be a mystery for those who insist on regarding him with the prejudiced eyes of theology, and on attributing his actions to a principle of which they can never have any clear ideas” (ch. ix.). It is certainly true as a historical fact that the rational treatment of insane persons, and the rational view of certain kinds of crime, were due to men like Pinel, trained in the materialistic school of the eighteenth century. And it was clearly impossible that the great and humane reforms in this field could have taken place before the decisive decay of theology. Theology assumes perversity as the natural condition of the human heart, and could only regard insanity as an intolerable exaggeration of this perversity. Secondly, the absolute independence of mind and body which theology brought into such overwhelming relief naturally excluded the notion that, by dealing with the

body, you might be doing something to heal the mind. Perhaps we are now in some danger of overlooking the potency of the converse illustration of what Holbach says: namely, the efficacy of mental remedies or preventives in the case of bodily disease.

If you complain — to resume our exposition — that the mechanism is not sufficient to explain the principle of the movements and faculties of the soul, the answer is, that it is in the same case with all the bodies in nature. In them the simplest movements, the most ordinary phenomena, the commonest actions, are inexplicable mysteries, whose first principles are for ever sealed to us. How shall we flatter ourselves that we know the first principle of gravity, by virtue of which a stone falls? What do we know of the mechanism that produces the attraction of some substances, and the repulsion of others? But surely the incomprehensibility of natural effects is no reason for assigning to them a cause that is still more incomprehensible than any of those within our cognisance.

It is not given to man to know everything; it is not given to him to know his own origin, nor to penetrate into the essence of things, nor to mount up to the first principle of things. What is given to him is to have reason, to have good faith, to concede frankly that he is ignorant of what he cannot know, and not to supplement his lack of certainty by words that are unintelligible, and suppositions that are absurd.

Suns go out and planets perish; new suns are kindled, and new planets revolve in new paths; and man — infinitely small portion of a globe that is itself only a small point in immensity — dreams that it is for him that the universe has been made, imagines that he must be the confidant of nature, and proudly flatters himself that he must be eternal! O man, wilt thou never conceive that thou art but an insect of a day? All changes in the universe; nature contains not a form that is constant; and yet thou wouldst claim that

thy species can never disappear, and must be excepted from the great universal law of incessant change!

We may pause for a moment to notice how, in their deliberate humiliation of the alleged pride of man, the orthodox theologian and the atheistic Holbach use precisely the same language. But the rebuke of the latter was sincere; it was indispensable in order to prepare men's minds for the conception of the universe as a whole. With the theologian the rebuke has now become little more than a hollow shift, in order to insinuate the miracle of Grace. The preacher of Naturalism replaces a futile vanity in being the end and object of the creation, by a fruitful reverence for the supremacy of human reason, and a right sense of the value of its discreet and disciplined use. The theologian restores this absurd and misleading egoism of the race, by representing the Creator as above all else concerned to work miracles for the salvation of a creature whose understanding is at once pitifully weak and odiously perverse, and whose heart is from the beginning wicked, corrupt, and given over to reprobation. The difference is plainly enormous. The theologian discourages men; they are to wait for the miracle of conversion, inert or desperate. The naturalist arouses them; he supplies them with the most powerful of motives for the energetic use of the most powerful of their endowments. "Men would always have Grace," says Holbach, with excellent sense, "if they were well educated and well governed." And he exclaims on the strange morality of those who attribute all moral evil to Original Sin, and all the good that we do to Grace. "No wonder," he says, "that a morality founded on hypotheses so ridiculous should prove to be of no efficacy."[153]

This brings us to Holbach's treatment of Morals. The moment had come to France, which was reached at an earlier period in English speculation, when the negative course of thought in metaphysics drove men to consider the basis of ethics. How were right and wrong to hold their own against the

new mechanical conception of the Universe? The same question is again urgent in men's minds, because the Darwinian hypothesis, and the mass of evidence for it, have again given a tremendous shake to theological conceptions, and startled men into a sense of the precariousness of the official foundations of virtue and duty.

Holbach begins by a most unflinching exposure of the inconsistency with all that we know of nature, of the mysterious theory of Free Will. This remains one of the most effective parts of the book, and perhaps the work has never been done with a firmer hand. The conclusion is expressed with a decisiveness that almost seems crude. There is declared to be no difference between a man who throws himself out of the window and the man whom I throw out, except this, that the impulse acting on the second comes from without, and that the impulse determining the fall of the first comes from within his own mechanism. You have only to get down to the motive, and you will invariably find that the motive is beyond the actor's own power or reach. The inexorable logic with which the author presses the Free-Willer from one retreat to another, and from shift to shift, leaves his adversary at last exactly as naked and defenceless before Holbach's vigorous and thoroughly realised Naturalism as the same adversary must always be before Jonathan Edwards's vigorous theism. "The system of man's liberty," Holbach says (II. ii.), with some pungency, "seems only to have been invented in order to put him in a position to offend his God, and so to justify God in all the evil that he inflicted on man, for having used the freedom which was so disastrously conferred upon him."

If man be not free, what right have we to punish those who cannot help committing bad actions, or to reward others who cannot help committing good actions? Holbach gives to this and the various other ways of describing fatalism as dangerous to society, the proper and perfectly adequate answer. He turns to the quality of the action, and connects with

that the social attitude of praise and blame. Merit and demerit are associated with conduct, according as it is thought to affect the common welfare advantageously or the reverse. My indignation and my approval are as necessary as the acts that excite these sentiments. My feelings are neither more nor less spontaneous than the deciding motives of the actor. Whatever be the necessitating cause of our actions, I have a right to do my best by praise and blame, by reward and punishment, to strengthen or to weaken, to prolong or to divert, the motives that are the antecedents of the action; exactly as I have a right to dam up a stream, or to divert its course, or otherwise deal with it to suit my own convenience. Penal laws, for instance, are ways of offering to men strong motives, to weigh in the scale against the temptation of an immediate personal gratification. Holbach does not make it quite distinct that the object of penal legislation is in some cases to give the offender, as well as other people, a strong reason for thinking twice before he repeats the offence; yet in other cases, where the punishment is capital, the legislation does not aim at influencing the mind of the offender at all, but the minds of other people only. This is only a side illustration of a common weakness in most arguments on this subject. A thorough vindication of the penal laws, on the principles of a systematic fatalism, can only be successful, if we think less of the wrongdoer in any given case, than of affecting general motives, and building up a right habit of avoiding or accepting certain classes of action.

The writer then justly connects his scientific necessarianism in philosophy with humanity in punishment. He protests against excessive cruelty in the infliction of legal penalties, and especially against the use of torture, on two grounds; first, that experience demonstrates the uselessness of these superfluous rigours; and, second, that the habit of witnessing atrocious punishments familiarises both criminals and others with the idea of cruelty. The acquiescence of Paris for a few months in the cruelties of the

Terror was no doubt due, on Holbach's perfectly sound principle, to the far worse cruelties with which the laws had daily made Paris familiar down to the last years of the monarchy. And Holbach was justified in expecting a greater degree of charitable and considerate judgment from the establishment in men's minds of a Necessarian theory. We are no longer vindictive against the individual doer; we wax energetic against the defective training and the institutions which allowed wrong motives to weigh more heavily with him than right ones. Punishment on the theory of necessity ought always to go with prevention, and is valued just because it is a force on prevention, and not merely an element in retribution.

Holbach answers effectively enough the common objection that his fatalism would plunge men's souls into apathy. If all is necessary, why shall I not let things go, and myself remain quiet? As if we *could* stay our hands from action, if our feelings were trained to proper sensibility and sympathy. As if it were possible for a man of tender disposition not to interest himself keenly in all that concerns the lot of his fellow-creatures. How does our knowledge that death is necessary prevent us from deploring the loss of a beloved one? How does my consciousness that it is the inevitable property of fire to burn, prevent me from using all my efforts to avert a conflagration?

Finally, when people urge that the doctrine of necessity degrades man by reducing him to a machine, and likening him to some growth of abject vegetation, they are merely using a kind of language that was invented in ignorance of what constitutes the true dignity of man. What is nature itself but a vast machine, in which our human species is no more than one weak spring? The good man is a machine whose springs are adapted so to fulfil their functions as to produce beneficent results for his fellows. How could such an instrument not be an object of respect and affection and gratitude?

In closing this part of Holbach's book, while not dissenting from his conclusions, we will only remark how little conscious he seems of the degree to which he empties the notions of praise and blame of the very essence of their old contents. It is not a modification, but the substitution of a new meaning under the old names. Praise in its new sense of admiration for useful and pleasure-giving conduct or motive, is as powerful a force and as adequate an incentive to good conduct and good motives, as praise in the old sense of admiration for a deliberate and voluntary exercise of a free-acting will. But the two senses are different. The old ethical association is transformed into something which usage and the requirements of social self-preservation must make equally potent, but which is not the same. If Holbach and others who hold necessarian opinions were to perceive this more frankly, and to work it out fully, they would prevent a confusion that is very unfavourable to them in the minds of most of those whom they wish to persuade. It is easy to see that the work next to be done in the region of morals, is the readjustment of the ethical phraseology of the volitional stage, to fit the ideas proper to the stage in which man has become as definitely the object of science as any of the other phenomena of the universe.

The chapter (xiii.) on the Immortality of the Soul examines this memorable growth of human belief with great vigour, and a most destructive penetration. As we have seen, the author repudiates the theory of a double energy in man, one material and the other spiritual, just as he afterwards repudiates the analogous hypothesis of a double energy in nature, one of the two being due to a spiritual mover outside of the external phenomena of the universe. Consistently with this renunciation of a separate spiritual energy in man, Holbach will listen to no talk of a spiritual energy surviving the destruction of the mechanical framework. To say that the soul will feel, think, enjoy, suffer, after the death of the body, is to

pretend that a clock broken into a thousand pieces can continue to strike or to mark the hours. And having emphatically proclaimed his own refusal to share the common belief, he proceeds with good success to carry the war into the country of those who profess that belief, and defend it as the safeguard of society. We need not go through his positions. They are substantially those which are familiar to everybody who has read the Third Book of Lucretius's poem, and remembers those magnificent passages which are not more admirable in their philosophy than they are noble and moving in their poetic expression: —

Nam veluti pueri trepidant atque omnia caecis In tenebris metuunt, sic nos in luce timemus Interdum, nilo quae sunt metuenda magis quam Quae pueri in tenebris pavitant finguntque futura. Hunc igitur terrorem animi tenebrasque necessest Non radii solis neque lucida tela diei Discutiant, sed naturae species ratioque.

And so forth, down to the exquisite lines —

"Jam jam non domus accipiet te laeta, neque uxoi Optima nec dulces occurrent oscula nati Praeripere, et tacita pectus dulcedine tangent. Non poteris factis florentibus esse, tuisque Praesidium. Misero misere," aiunt, "omnia ademit Una dies infesta tibi tot praemia vitae." Illud in his rebus non addunt, "nec tibi earum Jam desiderium rerum super insidet una." Quod bene si videant animo dictisque sequantur, Dissolvant animi magno se angore metuque. "Tu quidem ut es leto sopitus, sic eris aevi Quod superest cunctis privatu' doloribus aegris: At nos horrifico cinefactum te prope busto Insatiabiliter deflevimus, aeternumque Nulla dies nobis maerorem e pectore demet." Illud ab hoc igitur quaerendum est, quid sit amari Tanto opere, ad somnum si res redit atque quietem, Cur quisquam æterno possit tabescere luctu.

We may regret that Holbach, in dealing with these solemn and touching things, should have been so devoid of historic spirit as to buffet David,

Mahomet, Chrysostom, and other holy personages, as superstitious brigands. And we may believe that he has certainly been too sweeping in denying any deterrent efficacy whatever to the fires of hell. But where Holbach found one person in 1770, he would find a thousand in 1880, to agree with him, that it is possible to think of commendations and inducements to virtue, that shall be at least as efficacious as the fiction of eternal torment, without being as cruel, as wicked, as infamous to the gods, and as degrading to men.

From his attack on Immortality, Holbach naturally turns with new energy, as do all who have passed beyond that belief, to the improvement of the education, the laws, the institutions, which are to strengthen and implant the true motives for turning men away from wrong and inspiring them to right. He draws a stern and prolonged indictment against the kings of the earth, in words that we have already quoted above, as unjust, incapable, depraved by license and impunity. One passage in this chapter is the scripture of a terrible prophecy, the very handwriting on the wall, which was to be so accurately fulfilled almost in the lifetime of the writer:— "The state of society is now a state of war of the Sovereign against all, and of each of its members against the other. Man is bad, not because he was born bad, but because he is made so; the great and the powerful crush with impunity the needy and the unfortunate, and these in turn seek to repay all the ill that has been done to them. They openly or privily attack a native land that is a cruel stepmother to them; she gives all to some of her children, while others she strips of all. Sorely they punish her for her partiality; they show her that the motives borrowed from another life are powerless against the passions and the bitter wrath engendered by a corrupt administration in the life here; and that all the terror of the punishments of this world is impotent against necessity, against criminal habits, against a dangerous organisation that no education has ever been applied to correct" (ch. xiv.).

In another place: “A society enjoys all the happiness of which it is susceptible so soon as the greater number of its members are fed, clothed, housed; are able, in a word, without an excessive toil, to satisfy the wants that nature has made necessities to them. Their imagination is content so soon as they have the assurance that no force can ravish from them the fruits of their industry, and that they labour for themselves. By a sequence of human madness, whole nations are forced to labour, to sweat, to water the earth with their tears, merely to keep up the luxury, the fancies, the corruption of a handful of insensates, a few useless creatures. So have religious and political errors changed the universe into a valley of tears.” This is an incessant refrain that sounds with hoarse ground-tone under all the ethics and the metaphysics of the book. There are scores of pages in which the same idea is worked out with a sombre vehemence, that makes us feel as if Robespierre were already haranguing in the National Assembly, Camille Desmoulins declaiming in the gardens of the Palais Royal, and Danton thundering at the Club of the Cordeliers. We already watch the smoke of the flaming châteaux, going up like a savoury and righteous sacrifice to the heavens.

From this point to the end of the first part of the book, it is not so much philosophy as the literature of a political revolution. There is a curious parenthesis in vindication not only of a contempt for death, but even of suicide; the writer pointing out with some malice that Samson, Eleazar, and other worthies caused their own death, and that Jesus Christ himself, if really the Son of God, dying of his own free grace, was a suicide, to say nothing of the various ascetic penitents who have killed themselves by inches.[154] “The fear of death, after all,” he says, summing up his case, “will only make cowards; the fear of its alleged consequences will only make fanatics or melancholy pietists, as useless to themselves as to others. Death is a resource that we do ill to take away from oppressed virtue, reduced, as

many a time it is, by the injustice of men to desperation." This was the doctrine in which the revolutionary generation were brought up, and the readiness with which men in those days inflicted death on themselves and on others showed how profoundly it had entered their souls.[155] We think, as we read, of Vergniaud and Condorcet carrying their doses of poison, of Barbaroux with his pistol, and Valazé with his knife, of Roland walking forth from Rouen among the trees on the Paris road, and there driving a cane-sword into his breast, as calmly as if he had been throwing off a useless vesture.

Holbach has been accused of reducing virtue to a far-sighted egoism,[156] and detached and crude propositions may be quoted, that perhaps give a literal warrant for the charge. Nominally he bases morality on happiness, but his real base is the happiness of the greatest number. To borrow Mr. Sidgwick's classification, Holbach is a universalistic and not an egoistic Hedonist. The spirit of what he says is, in fact, not individualist but social. "The good man is he to whom true ideas have shown his own interest or his own happiness to lie in such a way of acting, that others are forced to love and approve for their own interest.... It is man who is most necessary to the well-being of man.... Merit and virtue are founded on the nature of man, on his needs.... It is by virtue that we are able to earn the goodwill, the confidence, the esteem, of all those with whom we have relations; in a word, no man can be happy alone.... To be virtuous is to place one's interest in what accords with the interest of others; it is to enjoy the benefits and the delights that one is the means of diffusing among them.... The sentiments of self-love become a hundred times more delicious when we see them shared by all those with whom our destiny binds us. The habit of virtue excites wants within us that only virtue can satisfy; thus it is that virtue is ever its own recompense, and pays itself with the blessings that it procures for others" (ch. xv.)

Surely it is a childish or pedantic misinterpretation to represent this as egoism, whether armed or not with keen sight; and still worse to talk of it as over-throwing the barriers that keep in the throng of selfish appetites. "Every citizen should be made to feel that the section of which he is a member is a Whole, that cannot subsist and be happy without virtue; experience should teach him at every moment that the wellbeing of the members can only result from that of the whole body" (ch. xv.) To say of such a doctrine as this, that it is to invite every individual to make himself happy after his own will and fashion, and to pull down the barriers of the selfish appetites, is the very absurdity of philosophic prejudice. It is for us to look at Holbach's ethical doctrine in its widest practical application, and if we place ourselves at a social point of view, we cannot but perceive that the principle laid down in the words that we have just quoted, was the indispensable weapon against the anti-social selfishness of the oppressive privileged class. These words represent the ethical side of every popular and democratic movement. You may class Holbach's morality as the morality of self-interest, if you please; but its true base lay in social sympathy. To proclaim happiness as the test of virtue was to develop the doctrine of naturalism; for happiness is the outcome of a conformity to the natural condition of things. On the other hand, to insist that virtue lies in promoting the happiness of the body social as a whole, was to preach the most sovereign of all truths, in a state of things where the body social as a whole was kept distracted and miserable by the selfishness of a scanty few of its members. The Church, nominally built upon the morality of the Golden Rule, was perverted into being the great organ of sinister self-interest. The Atheists, apparently formulating the morality of the Epicureans, were in effect the teachers of public spirit and beneficence. And, taught in such circumstances, public spirit could only mean revolution. We may doubt whether Holbach had thought out the very different questions that may be

fused under the easy phrase of a basis for morals. What are the sanctions of moral precepts? Why ought each to seek the happiness of all? What is the mark of the difference between right and wrong? What is the foundation of Conscience, or that habit of mind which makes right as such seem preferable to wrong? Clearly these are all entirely separate topics. Yet Holbach, it is obvious, had not divided them in his own mind, and he seems to think that one and the same answer will serve for what he mistook for one and the same question. He found it enough to say that every individual wishes to be happy, and that he cannot be happy unless he is on good terms with his neighbours; this reciprocity of needs and services he called the basis of morals. For a rough and common-sense view of the matter, such as Holbach sought to impress on his readers, this perhaps will do very well; but it is not the product of accurate and scientific thinking.

It is not necessary, again, to point out how Holbach, while expounding the System of Nature, left out of sight the great natural process by which the moral acquisition of one generation becomes the starting-point of further acquisitions in the next. He forgot the stages. He talks of Man as if all the races and eras of man were alike, and also as if each individual deliberately worked out sums in happiness on his own account. It would not only have been more true, according to modern opinions, but more in accordance with Holbach's own view of necessity, and of the irremovable chain that binds a man's conduct fast to a series of conditions that existed before he was born, if he had recognised conscience, moral preferences, interest in the public good, and all that he called the basis of morals, as coming to a man with the rest of the apparatus that the past imposes on the present, and not as due to any process of personal calculation.

Holbach had not clearly thought out the growth, the changes, varieties, and transformations among moral ideals. He was, of course, far too much in the full current of the eighteenth century not to feel that exultation in life

and its most exuberant manifestations, which the conventional moralists of the theological schools had set down and proscribed as worldliness and fleshliness. "*Action*," he says in this very chapter; "*action is the true element of the human mind*; no sooner does man cease to act, than he falls into pain and weariness of spirit." No doubt this is too absolutely stated, if we are to take some millions of orientals into our account of the human mind, but it has been true of the nations of the west. Yet the recognition of this law did not prevent the writer from occasionally falling into some of the old canting commonplaces about people being happiest who have fewest wants. As if, on the contrary, that action which he describes as the true element of man, were not directly connected with the incessant multiplication of wants. We may take this, however, as a casual lapse into the common form of moralists of ascetic ages. In substance the *System of Nature* is essentially a protest against ascetic and quietist ideals.

The second half of the *System of Nature* treats of the Deity; the proofs of his existence; his attributes; the manner in which he influences the happiness of men. What is remarkable is that here we have an onslaught, not merely on the Church with its overgrowth of abuses, nor on Christianity with its overgrowth of superstitions, but on that great conception which is enthroned on unseen heights far above any Church and any form of Christianity. It is theism, in its purest as in its impurest shape, that the writer condemns. No more elaborate, trenchant, and unflinching attack on the very fundamental propositions of theology, natural or revealed, is to be found in literature. Pure rationalism has nothing to add to this destructive onslaught. The tone is not truly philosophic, because the writer habitually regards the notion of a God as an abnormal and morbid excrescence, and not as a natural growth in human development. He takes no trouble, and it would have been an incredible departure from the mental fashion of the time if he

had taken any trouble, to explain theology, or to penetrate behind its forms to those needs, aspirations, and qualities of human constitution in which theology had its best justification, if not its earliest source. He regards it as an enemy to be mercilessly routed, not as a force with which he has to make his account. Still, as a piece of rough and remorseless polemic, the second part of the *System of Nature* remains full of remarkable energy and power. The most eager Nescient or Denier to be found in the ranks of the assailants of theology in our own day is timorous and moderate compared with this direct and on-pressing swordsman. And the attack, on its own purely rationalistic ground, is thoroughly comprehensive. It is not made on an outwork here, or an outwork there; it encircles the whole compass of the defence. The conception of God is examined and resisted from every possible side — cosmological, ethical, metaphysical. To say that the argument is one-sided, is only to say that it is an attack. But the fact that the writer omits the contributions made under the temporal shelter of theology to morality and civilisation, does not alter the other fact that he states with unsurpassed vigour all that can be said against the intellectual absurdities and moral obliquities that theology has nourished and approved, and only too firmly planted.

Of the elaborate examination of the proofs of the existence of a God adduced by Descartes, Samuel Clarke, Malebranche, and Newton (ch. iv. and v.), we need only say that its whole force might have been summed up in the single proposition that the author once for all repudiates any *à priori* basis for any beliefs whatever. It would have been sufficient for philosophic purposes if he had contented himself with justifying and establishing that position. The fabric of orthodox demonstration would have fallen to the ground after the destruction of its foundations. Holbach rejected the whole *à priori* system; it was a matter of course therefore that he rejected each one of the twelve propositions which Clarke had invented

by the *à priori* method. Holbach held that experience is the source and limit of knowledge, reasoning, and belief, and rejected as a fantastic impertinence of dreamy metaphysicians the assumption that our conceptions measure the necessities of objective existence. From that point of view, merely to state was to empty of all demonstrating quality such assertions as that something has existed from all eternity; an independent and immutable Being has existed from all eternity; this immutable and independent Being exists by himself, and is incomprehensible; the Being existing necessarily is necessarily single and unique — and so forth. Even if we accept this *à priori* method, and accept the first assumption that something must have existed from all eternity, it was open to Holbach to say, as Locke said on setting himself to examine Descartes' proof of a God: "I found that, by it, senseless matter might be the first eternal being and cause of all things, as well as an immaterial intelligent spirit." But what we feel is that the whole controversy is being conducted between two disputants on two different planes of thought, between two creatures dwelling in different elements. To apply to Clarke's propositions, or to the slightly different propositions of Malebranche, the test of experience, to measure them by the principle of relativity, must be fatal in the minds of such persons as already accept experience as the only right test in such a matter. It is exactly as if the action of an Italian opera should be criticised in the light of the conditions of real life: the whole performance must in an instant figure as an absurdity. No partisan of the lyric drama would consent to have it so judged, and the philosophic partisans of theology would perhaps have been wiser to keep clear of pretensions to *prove* their master thesis. They might have been content to keep it as an emotional creation, an imaginative hypothesis, a noble simplification of the chimeras of the primitive consciousness of the race.

As it was, neither side could be convinced by the other, for they had no common criterion. They had hardly even a common language. The only effect of Holbach's blows was to persuade the bystanders who thronged round the lists in that eager time, that the so-called proofs with which the high philosophic names were associated, were only proofs to those who accepted a way of thinking which it was the very characteristic of that age decisively to reject. The controversial force of this part of the attack simply lay in the piercing thoroughness with which the irreconcilable discrepancies between the seventeenth century notion of demonstration, and that notion in the eighteenth, were forced upon the reader's attention.

One other remark may be made. Whatever we may think of the success of the author's assault on the theistic hypothesis of the universe, it is impossible to deny that he at least succeeds in repelling the various assaults levelled on what is vulgarly termed atheism. He rightly urges the unreasonableness of taxing those who have formed to themselves intelligible notions of the moving power of the universe, with denying the existence of such a power; the absurdity of charging the very men who found everything that comes to pass in the world on fixed and constant laws, with attributing everything to chance. If by Atheist, he says, you mean a man who would deny the existence of a force inherent in matter, and without which you cannot conceive nature, and if to this moving force you give the name of God, then an Atheist would be a madman. Holbach then describes the sense in which Atheists both exist and, as he thinks, may well justify their existence. Their qualities are as follows: To be guided only by experience and the testimony of their senses, and to perceive nothing in nature except matter, essentially active and mobile and capable of producing all the beings that we see; to forego all search for a chimerical cause, and not to mistake for better knowledge of the moving force of the universe, merely a separate attribution of it to a Being placed outside of the

great whole; to confess in good faith that their mind can neither conceive nor reconcile the negative attributes and theological abstractions with the human and moral qualities that are ascribed to the Divinity.

The chapter (ix.) on the superiority of Naturalism over Theism as a basis for the most wholesome kind of Morality, is still worth reading by men in search of weapons against the presumptuous commonplaces of the pulpit. In this sphere Holbach is as earnest and severe as the most rigorous moralist that ever wrote. People who talk of the moral levity of the destructive literature of the eighteenth century would be astonished, if they could bring themselves to read the books about which they talk, by the elevation of the *System of Nature*. The writer points out the necessarily evil influence upon morals of a Book popularly taken to be inspired, in which the Divinity is represented as now prescribing virtue, but now again prescribing crime and absurdity; who is sometimes the friend, and sometimes the enemy, of the human race; who is sometimes pictured as reasonable, just, and beneficent, and at other times as insensate: unjust, capricious, and despotic. Such divinities, and the priests of such divinities, are incapable of being the models, types, and arbiters of virtue and righteousness. No; we must seek a base for morality in the necessity of things. Whatever the Cause that placed man in the abode in which he dwells, and endowed him with his faculties — whether we regard the human species as the work of Nature, or of some intelligent Being distinct from Nature — the existence of man, such as we see him to be, is a fact. We see in him a being who feels, thinks, has intelligence, has self-love, who strives to make life agreeable to himself, and who lives in society with beings like himself; beings whom by his conduct he may make his friends or his enemies. It is on these universal sentiments that you ought to base morality, which is nothing more nor less than the science of the duties of man living in society. The moment you attempt to find a base for morals outside of human nature, you go wrong; no

other is solid and sure. The aid of the so-called sanctions of theology is not only needless, but mischievous. The alliance of the realities of duty with theological phantoms exposes duty to the same ruin which daylight brings to the superstition that has been associated with duty. It sets up the arbitrary demands of a varying something, named Piety, in place of the plain requirements of Right. As for saying that without God man cannot have moral sentiments, or, in other words, cannot distinguish between vice and virtue, it is as if one said that, without the idea of God, man would not feel the necessity of eating and drinking.

The writer then breaks out into a long and sustained contrast, from which we may make a short extract to illustrate the heat to which the battle had now come:

"Nature invites man to love himself, incessantly to augment the sum of his happiness: Religion orders him to love only a formidable God who is worthy of hatred; to detest and despise himself, and to sacrifice to his terrible idol the sweetest and most lawful pleasures. Nature bids man consult his reason, and take it for his guide: Religion teaches him that this reason is corrupted, that it is a faithless, truthless guide, implanted by a treacherous God, to mislead his creatures. Nature tells man to seek light, to search for the truth: Religion enjoins upon him to examine nothing, to remain in ignorance. Nature says to man: 'Cherish glory, labour to win esteem, be active, courageous, industrious:' Religion says to him: 'Be humble, abject, pusillanimous, live in retreat, busy thyself in prayer, meditation, devout rites; be useless to thyself, and do nothing for others.' Nature proposes for her model, men endowed with noble, energetic, beneficent souls, who have usefully served their fellow-citizens: Religion makes a show and a boast of the abject spirits, the pious enthusiasts, the phrenetic penitents, the vile fanatics, who for their ridiculous opinions have troubled empires.... Nature tells children to honour, to love, to hearken to

their parents, to be the stay and support of their old age: Religion bids them prefer the oracle of their God, and to trample father and mother under foot, when divine interests are concerned. Nature commands the perverse man to blush for his vices, for his shameless desires, his crimes: Religion says to the most corrupt: 'Fear to kindle the wrath of a God whom thou knowest not: but if against his laws thou hast committed crime, remember that he is easy to appease and of great mercy: go to his temple, humble thyself at the feet of his ministers, expiate thy misdeeds by sacrifices, offerings, prayers; these will wash away thy stain in the eyes of the Eternal.'"

Of course, philosophical criticism would have much to say about this glowing mass of furious propositions; for the first voice of Nature hardly whispers into the ear of the primitive man all these high and generous promptings. But if by Nature we here understand the Encyclopædists, and by Religion the Catholic Church in France at that moment, then Holbach's fiery antitheses are a tolerably fair account of the matter. And the political side of the indictment was hardly less just, though its hardihood appalled men like Voltaire.

"Nature says to man, 'Thou art free, and no power on earth can lawfully strip thee of thy rights:' Religion cries to him that he is a slave condemned by God to groan under the rod of God's representatives. Nature bids man to love the country that gave him birth, to serve it with all loyalty, to bind his interests to hers against every hand that might be raised upon her: Religion commands him to obey without a murmur the tyrants that oppress his country, to take their part against her, to chain his fellow-citizens under their lawless caprices. Yet if the Sovereign be not devoted enough to his priests, Religion instantly changes her tone; she incites the subjects to rebellion, she makes resistance a duty, she cries aloud that we must obey God rather than man.... If the nature of man were consulted on Politics, which supernatural ideas have so shamefully depraved, it would contribute far more than all the

religion in the world to make communities happy, powerful, and prosperous under reasonable authority.... This nature would teach princes that they are men and not gods; that they are citizens charged by their fellow-citizens with watching over the safety of all.... Instead of attributing to the divine vengeance all the wars, the famines, the plagues that lay nations low, would it not have been more useful to show them that such calamities are due to the passions, the indolence, the tyranny of their princes, who sacrifice the nations to their hideous delirium? Natural evils demand natural remedies; ought not experience, therefore, long ago to have undeceived mortals as to those supernatural remedies, those expiations, prayers, sacrifices, fastings, processions, that all the peoples of the earth have so vainly opposed to the woes that overwhelmed them?... Let us recognise the plain truth, then, that it is these supernatural ideas that have obscured morality, corrupted politics, hindered the advance of the sciences, and extinguished happiness and peace even in the very heart of man."

Holbach was a vigorous propagandist. Two years after the appearance of his master-work he drew up its chief propositions in a short and popular volume, called *Good sense; or Natural Ideas opposed to Supernatural*. His zeal led him to write and circulate a vast number of other tractates and short volumes, the bare list of which would fill several of these pages, all inciting their readers to an intellectual revolt against the reigning system in Church and State. He lived to get a glimpse of the very edge and sharp bend of the great cataract. He died in the spring of 1789. If he had only lived five years longer, he would have seen the great church of Notre Dame solemnly consecrated by legislative decree to the worship of Reason, bishops publicly trampling on crosier and ring amid universal applause, and vast crowds exulting in processions whose hero was an ass crowned with a mitre.

CHAPTER VII. RAYNAL'S HISTORY OF THE INDIES.



""SINCE MONTESQUIEU'S *ESPRIT des Lois*," says Grimm in his chronicle, "our literature has perhaps produced no monument that is worthier to pass to the remotest posterity, and to consecrate the progress of our enlightenment and diligence for ever, than Raynal's *Philosophical and Political History of European settlements and commerce in the two Indies*." Yet it is perhaps safe to say that not one hundred persons now living have ever read two chapters of the book for which this immortal future was predicted.

When the revolutionary floods gradually subsided, some of the monuments of the previous age began to show themselves above the surface of the falling waters. They had lost amid the stormy agitation of the deluge the shining splendour of their first days; still men found something to attract them after the revolution, as their grandfathers had done before it, in the pages of the *Spirit of Laws*, of the *New Heloïsa*, and the endless satires, romances, and poems of the great Voltaire. Raynal's book was not among these dead glories that came to life again. It disappeared utterly. Nor can it be said that it deserved a kinder fate. Its only interest now is for those who care to know the humour of men's minds in those præ-revolutionary days, when they could devour a long political and commercial history as if it had been a novel or a play, and when the turn of men's interests made of such a book "the Bible of two worlds for nearly twenty years."

Raynal is no commanding figure. Born in 1711, he came to Paris from southern France, and joined the troop of needy priests who swarmed in the great city, hopefully looking out for the prizes of the Church. Raynal is the hero of an anecdote which is told of more than one abbé of the time; whether literally true or not, it is probably a correct illustration of the evil

pass to which ecclesiastical manners had come. He had, it was said, nothing to live upon save the product of a few masses. The Abbé Prévost received twenty sous for saying a mass; he paid the Abbé Laporte fifteen sous to be his deputy; the Abbé Laporte paid eight sous to Raynal to say it in his stead. But the adventurer was not destined to remain in this abject case, parasite humbly feeding on parasite. He turned bookmaker, and wrote a history of the Stadtholderate, a volume about the English Parliament, and, of all curious subjects for a man of letters of that date, an account of the divorce of King Henry the Eighth of England. He visited this country more than once, and had the honour in 1754 of being chosen a fellow of the Royal Society of London.[157] We have some difficulty in understanding how he came by such fame, just as we cannot tell how the man who had been glad to earn a few pence by saying masses, came shortly to be rich and independent. He is believed to have engaged in some colonial ventures, and to have had good luck. His enemies spread the dark report that he had made money in the slave trade, but in those days of incensed party spirit there was no limit to virulent invention. It is at least undeniable that Raynal put his money to generous uses. Among other things, he had the current fancy of the time, that the world could be made better by the copious writing of essays, and he delighted in founding prizes for them at the provincial academies. It was at Lyons that he proposed the famous thesis, not unworthy of consideration even at this day: *Has the discovery of America been useful or injurious to the human race?*

Raynal was one of the most assiduous of the guests at the philosophic meals of Baron Holbach and Helvétius; he was very good-humoured, easy to live with, and free from that irritable self-consciousness and self-love which is too commonly the curse of the successful writer, as of other successful persons. He did not go into company merely to make the hours fly. With him, as with Helvétius, society was a workshop. He pressed every

one with questions as to all matters, great or small, with which the interlocutor was likely to be familiar.[158] Horace Walpole met him at "dull Holbach's," and the abbé at once began to tease him across the table as to the English colonies. Walpole knew as little about them as he knew about Coptic, so he made signs to his tormentor that he was deaf. On another occasion Raynal dined at Strawberry Hill, and mortified the vanity of his host by looking at none of its wonders himself, and keeping up such a fire of talk and cross-examination as to prevent anybody else from looking at them. "There never was such an impertinent and tiresome old gossip," cried our own gossip.[159]

Raynal failed to give better men than Horace Walpole the sense of power. When his greatest work took the public by storm, nobody would believe that he had written it. Just as in the case of the *System of Nature*, so people set down the *History of the Indies* to Diderot, and even the most moderate critics insisted that he had at any rate written not less than one-third of it. Many less conspicuous scribes were believed to have been Raynal's drudges. We can have no difficulty in supposing that so bulky a work engaged many hands. There is no unity of composition, no equal scale, no regularity of proportion; on the contrary, rhapsody and sober description, history and moral disquisition, commerce, law, physics, and metaphysics are all poured in, almost as if by hazard. We seem to watch half a dozen writers, each dealing with matters according to his own individual taste and his own peculiar kind of knowledge.

Indeed, it is a curious and most interesting feature in the literary activity of France in the eighteenth century, that the egoism and vanity of authorship were reduced by the conditions of the time to a lower degree than in any other generation since letters were invented. The suppression of self by the Jesuits was hardly more complete than the suppression of self by the most brilliant and effective of the insurgents against Jesuitry. Such intimate

association as exists in our day between a given book and a given personality, was then thoroughly shaken by the constant necessity for secrecy. As we have seen, people hardly knew who set up that momentous landmark, the *System of Nature*. Voltaire habitually and vehemently denied every one of his most characteristic pieces, and though in the buzz of Parisian gossip the right name was surely hit upon for such unique performances as Voltaire's, yet the fame was far too broken and uncertain to reward his vanity, if the better part of himself had not been fully and sincerely engaged in public objects in which vanity had no part. Rousseau was an exception, but then Rousseau was in truth a reactionist, and not a loyal member of the great company of reformers. As for Diderot, he valued the author's laurel so cheaply, as we have seen, that with a gigantic heedlessness and Saturnian weariness of the plaudits or hisses of the audience, while supremely interested in the deeper movements of the tragi-comic drama of the world, he left some of his masterpieces lying unknown in forgotten chests. Again, in the case of the Encyclopædia, as we have also seen, Turgot as well as less eminent men bargained that their names should not be made public. Wherever a telling blow was to be dealt with the sword, or a new stone to be laid with the trowel, men were always found ready to spend themselves and be spent, without taking thought whether their share in the work should be nicely measured and publicly identified, or absorbed and lost in the whole of which it was a part.

Whatever may have been the secret of the authorship of Raynal's book, and whether or no even the general conception of such a performance was due to Raynal, it is at least certain that the original author, whoever he may have been, divined a remarkable literary opportunity. This divination is in authorship what felicity of experiment is to the scientific discoverer. The book came into immediate vogue. It was published in 1772; a second edition was demanded within a couple of years, and it is computed that

more than twenty editions, as well as countless pirated versions, were exhausted before the universal curiosity and interest were satisfied. As the subject took the writer over the whole world, so he found readers in every part of the habitable globe. And among them were men for whom destiny had lofty parts in store. Zeal carried one young reader so far that he collected all the boldest passages into a single volume, and published it as *L'Esprit de Raynal*; an achievement for which, as he was a member of a religious congregation, he afterwards got into some trouble.[160] Franklin read and admired the book in London. Black Toussaint Louverture in his slave-cabin at Hayti laboriously spelled his way through its pages, and found in their story of the wrongs of his race and their passionate appeal against slavery, the first definite expression of thoughts which had already been dimly stirred in his generous spirit by the brutalities that were every day enacted under his eyes. Gibbon solemnly immortalised Raynal by describing him, in one of the great chapters of the *Decline and Fall*, as a writer who "with a just confidence had prefixed to his own history the honourable epithets of political and philosophical."[161] Robertson, whose excellent *History of America*, covering part of Raynal's ground, was not published until 1777, complimented Raynal on his ingenuity and eloquence, and reproduced some of Raynal's historical speculations.[162]

Frederick the Great began to read it, and for some days spoke enthusiastically to his French satellites at dinner of its eloquence and reason. All at once he became silent, and he never spoke a word about the book again. He had suddenly come across half a dozen pages of vigorous rhapsodising, delivered for his own good:

"Oh Frederick, Frederick! thou wast gifted by nature with a bold and lively imagination, a curiosity that knew no bounds, a passion for industry. Humanity, everywhere in chains, everywhere cast down, wiped away her tears at the sight of thy earliest labours, and seemed to find a solace for all

her woes in the hope of finding in thee her avenger. On the dread theatre of war thy swiftness, skill, and order amazed all nations. Thou wast regarded as the model of warrior-kings. There exists a still more glorious name: the name of citizen-king.... Once more open thy heart to the noble and virtuous sentiments that were the delight of thy young days." He then rebukes Frederick for keeping money locked up in his military chest, instead of throwing it into circulation, for his violent and arbitrary administration, and for the excessive imposts under which his people groaned. "Dare still more; give rest to the earth. Let the authority of thy mediation, and the power of thy arms, force peace on the restless nations. The universe is the only country of a great man, and the only theatre for thy genius; become then the benefactor of nations."[163]

In after days, when Raynal visited Berlin, overflowing with vanity and self-importance, he succeeded with some difficulty in procuring an interview with the King, and then Frederick took his revenge. He told Raynal that years ago he had read the history of the Stadtholderate, and of the English Parliament. Raynal modestly interposed that since those days he had written more important works. "*I don't know them*," said the king, in a tone that closed the subject.[164]

More disinterested persons than Frederick set as low a value on Raynal's performance. One writer even compares the book to a quack mounted on a waggon, retailing to the gaping crowd a number of commonplaces against despotism and religion, without a single curious thing about them except their hardihood.[165] But the instinct of the gaping crowd was sound. Measured by the standard and requirements of modern science, Raynal's history is no high achievement. It may perhaps be successfully contended that the true conception of history has on the whole gone back, rather than advanced, within the last hundred years. There have been many signs in our own day of its becoming narrow, pedantic, and trivial. It threatens to

degenerate from a broad survey of great periods and movements of human societies into vast and countless accumulations of insignificant facts, sterile knowledge, and frivolous antiquarianism, in which the spirit of epochs is lost, and the direction, meaning, and summary of the various courses of human history all disappear. Voltaire's *Essai sur les Mœurs* shows a perfectly true notion of what kind of history is worth either writing or reading. Robertson's *View of the Progress of Society in Europe from the Fall of the Roman Empire to the Sixteenth Century* is — with all its imperfections — admirably just, sensible, and historic in its whole scope and treatment. Raynal himself, though far below such writers as Voltaire and Robertson in judgment and temper, yet is not without a luminous breadth of outlook, and does not forget the superior importance of the effect of events on European development, over any possible number of minute particularities in the events themselves. He does not forget, for instance, in describing the Portuguese conquests in the East Indies, to point out that the most remarkable and momentous thing about them was the check that they inflicted on the growth of the Ottoman Power, at a moment in European history when the Christian states were least able to resist, and least likely to combine against the designs of Solyman.[166] This is really the observation best worth making about the Portuguese conquests, and it illustrates Raynal's habit, and the habit of the good minds of that century, of incessantly measuring events by their consequences to western enlightenment and freedom, and of dropping out of sight all irrelevancies of detail.

This signal merit need not blind us to Raynal's shortcomings in the other direction. There are very few dates. The total absence of references and authorities was condemned by Gibbon as "the unpardonable blemish of what is otherwise a most entertaining book." There is no criticism. As Raynal was a mere literary compiler, it was not to be expected that he

should rise above the common deficiencies in the thought and methods of his time. It was not to be expected that he should deal with the various groups of phenomena among primitive races, in the scientific spirit of modern anthropology. It is true that he was contemporary with De Brosses, who ranks among the founders of the study of the origins of human culture. One sentence of De Brosses would have warned Raynal against a vicious method, which made nearly all that was written about primitive men by him and everybody else of the same school, utterly false, worthless, and deluding. “It is not in possibilities,” said De Brosses, “it is in man himself that we must study man: it is not for us to imagine what man might have done, or ought to have done, but to observe what he did.” Of the origin and growth of a myth, for example, Raynal had no rational idea. When he found a myth, what he did was to reduce it to the terms of human action, and then coolly to describe it as historical. The ancient Peruvian legend that laws and arts had been brought to their land by two divine children of the Sun, Manco-Capac and his sister-wife Manca-Oello, is transformed into a grave and prosaic narrative, in which Manco-Capac’s achievements are minutely described with as much assurance as if that sage had been Frederick the Great, or Pombal, or any statesman living before the eyes of the writer. Endless illustrations, some of them amusing enough, might be given of this Euhemeristic fashion of dealing with the primitive legends of human infancy.

On the other hand, if Raynal turns myth into history, he constantly resorts to the opposite method, and turns the hard prose of real life into doubtful poetry. If he reduces the demi-gods to men, he delights also in surrounding savage men with the joyous conditions of the pastoral demi-gods. He can never resist an opportunity of introducing an idyll. It was the fashion of the time, begun by Rousseau and perfected by the author of *Paul and Virginia*. The taste for idylls of savage life had at least one merit; it was

a way of teaching people that the life of savages is something normal, systematic, coherent, and not mere chaos, formless, and void, unrelated to the life of civilisation. A recent traveller had given an account of an annual ceremony in China, which Raynal borrowed without acknowledgment.[167] M. Poivré had described how the Emperor once every year went forth into the fields, and there with his own hand guided the plough as it traced the long furrows. Raynal elaborated this formality into a characteristic rhapsody on peace, simplicity, plenty, and the father of his people. As a caustic critic of M. Poivré remarked, if a Chinese traveller had arrived at Versailles on the morning of Holy Thursday, he would have found the King of France humbly washing the feet of twelve poor and aged men, yet, as Frenchmen knew, this would be no occasion for rapturous exultation over the lowliness and humanity of the French court.

In the same spirit Raynal made no scruple in filling his pages with the sentimental declamations in which the reaction of that day against the burden of a decaying system of social artifice found such invariable relief and satisfaction. None of these imaginary pieces of high sentiment was more popular than the episode of Polly Baker. It occurs in the chapters which describe the foundation of New England.[168] The fanaticism and intolerance of the Puritan Fathers of that famous land are set forth with the holy rage that always moved the reformers of the eighteenth century against the reformers of the seventeenth. Religion is boldly spoken of as a dreadful malady, whose severity extended even to the most indifferent objects. It may be admitted that the cruel persecution of the Quakers, and the grotesque horrors of witch-finding in New Salem, gave Raynal at least as good a text against Protestantism as he had found against Catholicism in the infernal doings in the West Indian Islands or in Peru. Even after this bloody fever had abated, says Raynal, the inhabitants still preserved a kind of rigorism that savours of the sombre days in which the Puritan colonies had

their rise. He illustrates this by the case of a young woman who was brought before the authorities for the offence of having given birth to a child out of wedlock. It was her fifth transgression. Raynal, conceiving history after the manner of the author of the immortal speeches of Pericles, put into the mouth of the unfortunate sinner a long and eloquent apology. At the risk of her life, she cries, she has brought five children into existence. “I have devoted myself with all the courage of a mother’s solicitude to the painful toil demanded by their weakness and their tender years. I have formed them to virtue, which is only another name for reason. Already they love their country, as I love it.... Is it a crime, then, to be fruitful, as the earth is fruitful, the common mother of us all?... And how am I not to cry out against the injustice of my lot, when I see that he who seduced and ruined me, after being the cause of my destruction, enjoys honour and power, and is actually seated in the tribunal where they punish my misfortune with rods and with infamy? Who was that barbarous lawgiver who, deciding between the two sexes, kept all his wrath for the weaker; for that luckless sex which pays for a single pleasure by a thousand dangers,” — and so forth. It need hardly be said that this is far too much in the vein, and almost in the words of Diderot, to have any authenticity. And as it happens, there is a piece of external evidence on the matter, which illustrates Raynal’s curious lightheartedness as to historic veracity. Franklin and Silas Deane were one day talking together about the many blunders in Raynal’s book, when the author himself happened to step in. They told him of what they had been speaking. “Nay,” says Raynal, “I took the greatest care not to insert a single fact for which I had not the most unquestionable authority.” Deane then fell on the story of Polly Baker, and declared of his own certain knowledge that there had never been a law against bastardy in Massachusetts. Raynal persisted that he must have had the whole case from some source of indisputable trustworthiness, until Franklin broke in upon

him with a loud laugh, and explained that when he was a printer of a newspaper, they were sometimes short of news, and to amuse his customers he invented fictions that were as welcome to them as facts. One of these fictions was the legend of Raynal's heroine. The abbé was not in the least disconcerted. "Very well, Doctor," he replied, "I would rather relate your stories than other men's truths."[169]

When all has been said that need be said about the glaring shortcomings of the *History of the Indies*, its popularity still remains to be accounted for. If we ask for the causes of this striking success, they are perhaps not very far to seek. For one thing, the book is remarkable both for its variety and its animation. Horace Walpole wrote about it to Lady Aylesbury in terms that do not at all overstate its liveliness: "It tells one everything in the world; how to make conquests, invasions, blunders, settlements, bankruptcies, fortunes, etc.; tells you the natural and historical history of all nations; talks commerce, navigation, tea, coffee, china, mines, salt, spices; of the Portuguese, English, French, Dutch, Danes, Spaniards, Arabs, caravans, Persians, Indians, of Louis XIV. and the King of Prussia, of La Bourdonnais, Dupleix, and Admiral Saunders; of rice, and women that dance naked; of camels, gingham, and muslin; of millions of millions of lires, pounds, rupees, and cowries; of iron cables and Circassian women; of Law and the Mississippi; and against all governments and religions."[170]

All this is really not too highly coloured. And Raynal's cosmorama exactly hit the tastes of the hour. The readers of that day were full of a new curiosity about the world outside of France, and the less known families of the human stock. It was no doubt more like the curiosity of keen-witted children than the curiosity of science. Montesquieu first stirred this interest in the unfamiliar forms of custom, institution, creed, motive, and daily manners. But while Montesquieu treated such matters fragmentarily, and in connection with a more or less abstract discussion on polity, Raynal made

them the objects of a vivid and concrete picture, and presented them in the easier shape of a systematic history. Again, if the reading class in France were intelligently curious, it must be added, we fear, that they were not without a certain lubricity of imagination, which was pleasantly tickled by sensuous descriptions of the ways of life that were strange to the iron restraints of civilisation. Finally, the public of that day always chose to veil and confuse the furtive voluptuousness of the time by moral disquisition, and a light and busy meddling with the insoluble perplexities of philosophy. Here too the dexterous Raynal knew how to please the fancies of his patrons, and whether Diderot was or was not the writer of those pages of moral sophism and paradox, there is something in them which incessantly reminds us of his *Supplement to Bougainville's Voyages*.

Among the superficial causes of the popularity of Raynal's *History*, we cannot leave out the circumstance that it was composed after a very interesting and critical moment in the colonial relations of France. The Seven Years' War ended in the expulsion of the French from Canada and from their possessions in the East Indies. When the peace of 1763 was made, this was counted the most disastrous part of that final record and sealing of misfortune. When we see with what attachment the ordinary Frenchman of to-day regards what is as yet the thankless possession of Algeria, we might easily have guessed, even if the correspondence of the time had set it forth less distinctly than it does, with what deep concern and mortification the French of that day saw the white flag and its lilies driven for ever from the banks of the St. Lawrence in the west, and the coast of Coromandel in the east. Raynal himself tells us with what zealous impatience the government attempted to make the nation forget its calamities, by stirring the hope of a better fortune in the region to which they gave the magnificent name of Equinoctial France. The establishment of a free and national population among the scented forests and teeming

swamps of Guiana, was to bring rich compensation for the icy tracts of Canada. This utopia of a brilliant settlement in Guiana has steadily invested the minds of French statesmen from Choiseul down to Louis Napoleon, and its history is a striking monument of perversity and folly. But from 1763 to 1770, while Raynal was writing his book, men's minds were full of the heroic design, and this augmented their interest in the general themes which Raynal handled — colonisation, commerce, and the overthrow and settlement of new worlds by the old.

However much all these things may have quickened the popularity of Raynal's *History*, yet the true source of it lay deeper; lay in the fuel which the book supplied to the two master emotions of the hour — the hatred and contempt for religion, and the passion for justice and freedom. The subject easily lent itself to these two strong currents. Or we may say that hatred of religion, and passion for justice and freedom, were in fact the subjects, and that the commercial establishments and political relations of the new worlds in the east and west were only the setting and framework. Raynal was perhaps the first person to see that the surest way of discrediting Catholicism was to write some chapters of its history. Gibbon resorted to the same device shortly afterwards, and found in the contemptuous analysis of heresies, and the selfish and violent motives of councils and prelates, as good an occasion of piercing the Church as Raynal found in painting the abominable fraud and cruelty that made the presence of Christians so dire a curse to the helpless inhabitants of the new lands. And the same reproachful background which Gibbon so artistically introduced, in the humane, intelligent, and happy epoch of the pagan Antonines, Raynal invented for the same purpose of making Christianity seem uglier, in the imaginary simplicity and unbroken gladness of the native races whose blood was shed by Christian aggressors as if it had been water.

It would perhaps have been singular at a moment when men were looking round on every side for such weapons as might come to their hand, if they had missed the horrible action of Catholicism when brought into contact with the lower races of mankind. There is no more deplorable chapter in the annals of the race, and there is none which the historian of Christianity should be less willing to pass over lightly. The ruthless cruelty of the Spanish conquerors in the new world is a profoundly instructive illustration of the essential narrowness of the papal Christianity, its pitiful exclusiveness, its low and bad morality, and, above all, its incurable unfitness for dealing with the spirit and motives of men in face of the violent temptations with which the wealth of the new world now assailed and corrupted them. Catholicism had held triumphant possession of the conscience of Europe for a dozen centuries and more. The stories of the American Archipelago, of Mexico, of Peru, even if told by calmer historians than Raynal, show how little power, amid all this triumph of the ecclesiastical letter, had been won by the Christian spirit over the rapacity, the lust, the bloody violence of the natural man. They show what a superficial thing the professed religion of the ages of faith had been, how enormous a task remained, and how much the most arduous part of this task was to make Catholicism itself civilised and moral. For it is hardly denied that Christianity had done worse than merely fail to provide an effective curb on the cruel passions of men. The Spanish conquerors showed that it had nursed a still more cruel passion than the rude interests of material selfishness had ever engendered, by making the extermination or enslavement of these hapless people a duty to the Catholic Church, and a savoury sacrifice in the nostrils of the Most High.

It is true that a philosophic historian will have to take into account the important consideration that the reckless massacres perpetrated by the subjects of the Most Catholic King were less horrible and less permanently

depraving than the daily offering of the bleeding hearts of human victims in the temples of Huitzilopochtli and Tezcatlipuk. He would have to remember, as even Raynal does, that if the slave-drivers and murderers were Catholics, so also was Las Casas, the apostle of justice and mercy. Still the fact remains, that the doctrine of moral obligations towards the lower races had not yet taken its place in Europe, any more than the doctrine of our obligation to the lower animals, our ministers and companions, has yet taken its place among Italians and Spaniards. The fact remains, that the old Christianity in the sixteenth century was unable to deal effectively with the new conditions in which the world found itself. As Catholicism now in France in the eighteenth century proved itself unable to harmonise the new moral aspirations and new social necessities of the time with the ancient tradition, Raynal was right in telling over again the afflicting story of her earlier failure, and in identifying the creed that murdered Calas and La Barre before their own eyes, with the creed that had blasted the future of the fairest portion of the new world two centuries before.

The mere circumstance, however, that the book was one long and powerful innuendo against the Church, would not have been enough to secure its vast popularity. Attacks on the Church had become cheap by this time. The eighteenth century, as it is one of the chief aims of these studies to show, had a positive side of at least equal importance and equal strength with its negative side. As we have so often said, its writers were inspired by zeal for political justice, for humanity, for better and more equal laws, for the amelioration of the common lot, — a zeal which in energy, sincerity, and disinterestedness, has never been surpassed. Raynal's work was perhaps, on the whole, the most vigorous and sustained of all the literary expressions that were given to the great social ideas of the century. It wholly lacked the strange and concentrated glow that burned in the pages of

the Social Contract; on the other hand, it was more full of movement, of reality, of vivid and picturesque incident. It was popular, and it was concrete. Raynal's story went straight to the hearts of many people, to whom Rousseau's arguments were only half intelligible and wholly dreary. It was that book of the eighteenth century which brought the lower races finally within the pale of right and duty in the common opinion of France. The engravings that face the title-page in each of the seven volumes give the keynote to the effect that the seven volumes produced. In one we see a philosopher writing on a column those old words of dolorous pregnancy, *Auri sacra fames*, while in the distance Spanish and Portuguese ships ride at anchor, and on the shore white men massacre blacks. In another we see a fair woman, typifying bounteous Nature, giving her nourishment to a white infant at one breast, and to a black infant at the other, while she turns a pitiful eye to a scene in the background, where a gang of negro slaves work among the sugar-canes, under the scourge and the goad of ruthless masters. A third frontispiece gives us the story of Inkle and Yarico, which Raynal sets down to some English poet, but as no English poet is known to have touched that moving tale until the younger Colman dramatised it in 1787, we may suspect that Raynal had remembered it from Steele's paper in the *Spectator*. The last of these pieces represents a cultivated landscape, adorned with villages, and its ports thronged with shipping; in the foreground are two Quakers, one of them benignly embracing some young Indians, the other casting indignantly away from him a bow and its arrows, the symbols of division and war.

The most effective chapters in the book were, in truth, eloquent sermons on these simple and pathetic texts. They brought Negroes and Indians within the relations of human brotherhood. They preached a higher morality towards these poor children of bondage, they inspired a new pity, they moved more generous sympathies, and they did this in such a way as not

merely to affect men's feelings about Indians and Negroes, slave-labour, and the yet more hateful slave-trade, but at the same time to develop and strengthen a general feeling for justice, equality, and beneficence in all the arrangements and relations of the social union all over the world. The same movement which brought the suffering blacks of the new world within the sphere of moral duty, and invested them with rights, intensified the same notion of rights and duties in association with the suffering people of France. This was the sentiment that reigned during the boyhood and youth of those who were destined, some twenty years after Raynal's book was first placed in their hands, to carry that sentiment out into a fiery and victorious reality.

Montesquieu had opened the various questions connected with slavery. We can have no better measure of the increased heat in France between 1750 and 1770 than the difference in tone between two authors so equal in popularity, if so unequal in merit, as Raynal and Montesquieu. The latter, without justifying the abuses or even the usage of slavery in any shape, had still sought to give a rational account of its growth as an institution.[171] Raynal could not read this with patience. He typifies all the passion of the revolt against the historic method. "Montesquieu," he says, "could not make up his mind to treat the question of slavery seriously. In fact, it is a degradation of reason to employ it, I will not say in defending, but even in combating an abuse so contrary to all reason. Whoever justifies so odious a system deserves from the philosopher the deepest contempt, and from the negro a dagger-stroke. 'If you put a finger on me, I will kill myself,' said Clarissa to Lovelace. And I would say to the man that should assail my freedom: If you come near me, I poniard you.... Will any one tell me that he who seeks to make me a slave, is only using his rights? Where are they, these rights? Who has stamped on them a mark sacred enough to silence mine? If thou thinkest thyself authorised to oppress me, because thou art

stronger and craftier than I — then do not complain when my strong arms shall tear thy breast open to find thy heart; do not complain when in thy spasm-riven bowels thou feelest the deadly doom which I have passed into them with thy food. Be thou a victim in thy turn, and expiate the crime of the oppressor."[172]

Raynal then asks the political question, how we can hope to throw down an edifice that is propped up by universal passion, by established laws, by the rivalries of powerful nations, and by the force of prejudices more powerful still. To what tribunal, he cries, shall we carry the sacred appeal? He can find no better answer than that of Turgot and the Economists. It is to Kings that we must look for the redress of these monstrous abominations. It is for Kings to carry fire and sword among the oppressors. "Your armies," he cries, anticipating the famous expression of a writer of our own day, "will be filled with the holy enthusiasm of humanity." In a more practical vein, Raynal then warns his public of the terrible reckoning which awaits the whites, if the blacks ever rise to avenge their wrongs. The Negroes only need a chief courageous enough to lead them to vengeance and carnage. "Where is he, that great man, whom Nature owes to the honour of the human race? Where is he, that new Spartacus who will find no Crassus? Then the Black Code will vanish; how terrible will the White Code be!" We may easily realise the effect which vehement words like these had upon Toussaint, and upon those for whom Toussaint reproduced them.

Men have constantly been asking themselves what the great literary precursors of the Revolution would have thought, and how they would have acted, if they could have survived to the days of the Terror. What would Voltaire have said of Robespierre? How would Rousseau have borne himself at the Jacobin Club? Would Diderot have followed the procession of the Goddess of Reason? To ask whether these famous men would have sanctioned the Terror, is to insult great memories; but there is no reason to

suppose that their strong spirits would have faltered. One or two of the younger generation of the famous philosophic party did actually see the break-up of the old order. Condorcet faced the storm with a heroism of spirit that has never been surpassed: disgust at the violent excesses of bad men could never make him unfaithful to the beneficence of the movement which their frenzy distorted.

Raynal was of weaker mould, and showed that there had been a stratum of cant and borrowed formulas in his eloquence. He lived into the very darkest days, and watched the succession of events with a keen eye. His heart began to quail very early. Long before the bloodier times of the internecine war between the factions, and on the eve of the attempted flight of the king, he addressed a letter to the National Assembly (May 31, 1791). The letter is not wanting in firm and courageous phrases. “I have long dared,” he began, “to tell kings of their duties. Let me to-day tell the people of its errors, and the representatives of the people of the perils that menace us all.” He then proceeded to inveigh in his old manner, but with a new purpose and a changed destination. This time it was not kings and priests whom he denounced, but a government enslaved by popular tyranny, soldiers without discipline, chiefs without authority, ministers without resources, the rudest and most ignorant of men daring to settle the most difficult political questions. How comes it, he asks, that after declaring the dogma of the liberty of religious opinions, you allow priests to be overwhelmed by persecution and outrage because they do not follow your religious opinions? In the same energetic vein he protests against the failure of the Constituent Assembly to found a stable and vigorous government, and to put an end to the vengeances, the seditions, the outbreaks, that filled the air with confusion and menace. It was in short a vigorous pamphlet, written in the interest of Malouet and the constitutional royalists. The Assembly listened, but not without some rude interruptions. Robespierre

hastened to the tribune. After condemning the tone of Raynal's letter, he disclaimed any intention of calling down the severity either of the Assembly or of public opinion upon a man who still preserved a great name; he thought that a sufficient excuse for the writer's apostasy might be found in his advanced age. The Assembly agreed with Robespierre, and passed to the order of the day.[173]

Raynal lived to see his predictions fulfilled with a terrible bitterness of fulfilment. In spite of the anger which he had roused in the breasts of powerful personages, the aged man was not guillotined; he was not even imprisoned. All his property was taken from him, and he died in abject poverty in the spring of 1796. Let us hope that the misery of his end was assuaged by the recollection that he had once been a powerful pleader for noble causes.

CHAPTER VIII. DIDEROT'S CLOSING YEARS.



AT THE END of a long series of notes and questions on points in anatomy and physiology, which he had been collecting for many years, Diderot wound up with a strange outburst:

"I shall not know until the end what I have lost or gained in this vast gaming-house, where I shall have passed some threescore years, dice-box in hand, *tesseras agitans*.

"What do I perceive? Forms. And what besides? Forms. Of the substance I know nothing. We walk among shadows, ourselves shadows to ourselves and to others.

"If I look at a rainbow traced on a cloud, I can perceive it; for him who looks at it from another angle, there is nothing.

"A fancy common enough among the living is to dream that they are dead, that they stand by the side of their own corpse, and follow their own funeral. It is like a swimmer watching his garments stretched out on the shore.

"Philosophy, that habitual and profound meditation which takes us away from all that surrounds us, which annihilates our own personality, is another apprenticeship for death."[174]

This was now to be seen. Diderot, as we have said, came back from his expedition to Russia in the autumn of 1744, tranquilly counting on half a score more years to make up the tale of his days. He remained in temper and habit through this long evening of his life what he had been in its morning and noontide — friendly, industrious, cheerful, exuberant in conversation, keenly interested in the march of liberal and progressive ideas. On his return his wife and daughter found him thin and altered. A few months of absence so often suffice to reveal that our friend has grown old,

and that time is casting long shadows. Age seems to have come in a day, like sudden winter. He was as gay and as kindly as ever. Some of his friends had declared that he would never bethink himself of returning at all. “Time and space in his eyes,” said Galiani, “are as in the eyes of the Almighty; he thinks that he is everywhere, and that he is eternal.”[175] They had predicted for Diderot at St. Petersburg the fate of Descartes at the court of Queen Christina. But the philosopher triumphantly vindicated his character. “My good wife,” said he, when he had reached the old familiar fourth floor, “prithee, count my things; thou wilt find no reason for scolding; I have not lost a single handkerchief.”[176]

This cheerfulness, however, did not hide from his friends that he was subject to a languor which had been unknown before his journey to Russia. It was not the peevish fatigue that often brings life to an unworthy close. He remained true to the healthy temper of his prime, and found himself across the threshold of old age without repining. As the veteran Cephalus said to Socrates, regrets and complaints are not in a man’s age, but in his temper; and he who is of a happy nature will scarcely feel the burden of the years.

In 1762 Diderot had written to Mdlle. Voland a page of affecting musings on the great pathetic theme:

“You ask me why, the more our life is filled up and busy, the less are we attached to it? If that is true, it is because a busy life is for the most part an innocent life. We think less about Death, and so we fear it less. Without perceiving it, we resign ourselves to the common lot of all the beings that we watch around us, dying and being born again in an incessant, ever renewing circle. After having for a season fulfilled the tasks that nature year by year imposes on us, we grow weary of them, and release ourselves. Energies fade, we become feebler, we crave the close of life, as after working hard we crave the close of the day. Living in harmony with nature, we learn not to rebel against the orders that we see in necessary and

universal execution.... There is nobody among us who, having worn himself out in toil, has not seen the hour of rest approach with supreme delight. Life for some of us is only one long day of weariness, and death a long slumber, and the coffin a bed of rest, and the earth only a pillow where it is sweet, when all is done, to lay one's head, never to raise it again. I confess to you that, when looked at in this way, and after the long endless crosses that I have had, death is the most agreeable of prospects. I am bent on teaching myself more and more to see it so."[177]

Again, we are reminded by Diderot's words on this last gentle epilogue to a harassing performance, of Plato's picture of aged Cephalus sitting in a cushioned chair, with the garland round his brows. "I was in the country almost alone, free from cares and disquiet, letting the hours flow on, with no other object than to find myself by the evening as sometimes one finds one's self in the morning, after a night that has been busy with a pleasant dream. The years had left me none of the passions that are our torment, none of the weariness that follows them; I had lost my taste for all the frivolities that are made so important by our hope that we shall enjoy them long. I said to myself: If the little that I have done, and the little that is left for me to do, should perish with me, what would the human race be the loser? What should I be the loser myself?"[178]

This was the mood in which Diderot wrote his singular apology for the life and character of Seneca. Rosenkranz makes the excellent reflection that though Diderot attained to a more free comprehension of Greek art, and especially of Homer, than most of his contemporaries, yet even with him the Roman element was dominant. It was Horace, Terence, Lucretius, Tacitus, Seneca, who to the very end came closer to him than any of the Greeks. The moralising reflection, the satirical tendency, the declamatory form of the Romans, all had an irresistible attraction for him.[179] Both Roger Bacon and Francis Bacon had preceded him in admiration for Seneca, and

Montaigne found Cicero tiresome and unprofitable compared with the author of the Epistles to Lucilius. “When there comes any misfortune to a European,” says the imaginary oriental of Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters*, “his only resource is the reading of a philosopher called Seneca.”[180]

But Diderot was not a man to admire by halves, and to literary praise of Seneca’s writings he added a thoroughgoing vindication of his career. In his early days he had referred disparagingly to Seneca,[181] but reflection or accident had made him change his mind. The cheap severity of abstract ethics has always abounded against Seneca, and this severity was what Diderot had all his life found insupportable. Holbach had induced Lagrange, a young man of letters whom he had rescued from want, to undertake the translation of Seneca, and when Lagrange died, Holbach prevailed on Naigeon, Diderot’s fervid disciple, to complete and revise the work, which still remains the best of the French versions. That done, then both Holbach and Naigeon urged Diderot to write an account of the philosopher.

The Essay on the Reigns of Claudius and Nero[182] is marked by as much vehemence, as much sincerity of enthusiasm, as if Seneca had been Diderot’s personal friend. There is a flame, a passion, about it, an ingenuous air of conviction, which are not common in historical apologies. It is inevitable, as the composition is Diderot’s, that it should have many a rambling and declamatory page. His paraphrases of Tacitus are the most curious case in literature of the expansion of a style of sombre poetic concentration into the style of exuberant rhetoric. Both Grimm and a Russian princess of the blood urged him even to translate the whole of Tacitus’s works, but it is certain that nobody in the world had ever less of Tacitean quality. Still the history is alive. “*I do not compose*,” Diderot said in the dedication. “*I am no author; I read or I converse; I ask questions and I give answers.*” The writer throws himself into the historic situation with the vivid freshness of a contemporary, and if the criticism is sophistical, at

least the picture is admirably dramatic. Seneca's position as the minister of Nero seemed exactly one of those cases which always excited Diderot's deepest interest — a case, we mean, in which the general rules of morality condemn, but common sense acquits.

Diderot, as we have already pointed out,[183] was always very near to the position that there is no such thing as an absolute rule of right and wrong, defining classes of acts unconditionally, but each act must be judged on its merits with reference to all the circumstances of the given case. Seneca's career tests this way of looking at things very severely. His connivance with the minor sensualities of Nero's youth, as a means of restraining him from downright crime, and of keeping a measure of order in the government, will perhaps be pardoned by most of those who realise the awful perils of the Empire. As Diderot says, nobody blames Fénelon or Bossuet for remaining at the court of Lewis XIV. in its days of license. But connivance with a king's amours, however degrading it may be from a certain point of view, is a very different thing from acquiescence in a king's murder of his mother. Even here Diderot's impetuosity carries him in two or three bounds over every obstacle. The various courses open to the minister, after the murder of Agrippina, are discussed and dismissed. What, after Nero had slain his mother, was there nothing left to be done by a firm, just, and enlightened man, with an immense burden of affairs on his back, and capable by his courage and benevolence, of bearing succour, repairing misfortunes, hindering depredations, removing the incompetent, and giving power to men of virtue, knowledge, and ability? If he had only saved the honour of a single good woman, or the life or fortune of a single good citizen; if he could bring a day of tranquillity to the provinces, or cross for a week the designs of the miscreants by whom the emperor was surrounded, then Seneca would have been blamed, and would have deserved blame, if he had either retired from court or put an end to his life.[184] This is all true enough,

and if Seneca had been only a statesman, the world would probably have applauded him for clinging to the helm at all cost. Unhappily, he was not only a statesman, but a moralist. The two characters are always hard to reconcile, as perhaps any parliamentary candidate might tell us. The contrast between lofty writing and slippery policy has been too violent for Seneca's good fame, as it was for Francis Bacon's. It is ever at his own proper risk and peril that a man dares to present high ideals to the world.

One of the strangest of the many strange digressions in which the Essay on Claudius and Nero abounds, brings us within the glare of the great literary quarrel of the century. Soon after Rousseau settled in Paris for the last time, on his return from England and the subsequent vagabondage, it was known that he had written the *Confessions*, dealing at least as freely with the lives of others as with his own. He had even in 1770 and 1771 given readings of certain passages from them, until Madame d'Epinay, and perhaps also the Maréchale de Luxemburg, prevailed on the authorities to interfere. No one was angrier than Diderot, and in the first edition of the Essay, published in the year of Rousseau's death (1778), he incongruously placed in the midst of his disquisitions on the philosopher of the first century, a long and acrimonious note upon the perversities of the reactionary philosopher of the eighteenth. He was believed by those who talked to him to be in dread of the appearance of the *Confessions*, and we may accept this readily enough, without assuming that Diderot was conscious of hidden enormities which he was afraid of seeing publicly uncovered. Rousseau, as Diderot well knew, was so wayward, so strangely oblique both in vision and judgment, that innocence was no security against malice and misrepresentation.

Rousseau's name has never lacked fanatical partisans down to our own day, and Diderot was attacked by some of the earliest of them for his note of disparagement. The first part of the *Confessions* — all that Diderot ever saw

— appeared in 1782, and in the same year Diderot published a second edition of the Essay on Claudius and Nero, so augmented by replies, inserted in season and out of season, to the diatribes of the party of Rousseau, that as it now stands the reader may well doubt whether the substance and foundation of the book is an apology for Seneca or a vindication of Denis Diderot. As Grimm said, we have to make up our minds to see the author suddenly pass from the palace of the Cæsars to the garret of MM. Royou, Grosier, and company; from Paris to Rome, and from Rome back again to Paris; from the reign of Claudius to the reign of Lewis XV.; from the college of the Sorbonne to the college of the augurs; to turn now to the masters of the world, and now to the yelping curs of literature; to see him in his dramatic enthusiasm making the one speak and the others answer; apostrophising himself and apostrophising his readers, and leaving them often enough in perplexity as to the personage who is speaking and the personage whom he addresses.[185] We may agree with Grimm that this gives an air of originality to the performance, but such originality is of a kind to displease the serious student, without really attracting the few readers who have a taste for rebelling against the pedantries of literary form. We become confused by the long strain of uncertainty whether we are reading about the Roman Emperor or the French King; about Seneca, Burrhus, and Thrasea, or Turgot, Malesherbes, and Necker.

Diderot's candour, simplicity, happy bonhommie, and sincerity in real interests raised him habitually above the pettiness, the bustling malice, the vain self-consciousness, the personalities that infest all literary and social cliques. It is surprising at first that Diderot, who had all his life borne the sting of the gnats of Grub Street with decent composure, should have been so moved by Rousseau, or by meaner assailants, whom Rousseau himself would have rudely disclaimed. The explanation seems to lie in this fact of human character, that a man of Diderot's temperament, while entirely

heedless of criticism directed against his opinions or his public position, is specially sensitive to innuendoes against his private benevolence and loyalty. An insult to the force of his understanding was indifferent to him, but an affront to one's *belle âme* is beyond pardon. It was hard that a man who had prodigally thrown away the forces of his life for others should be charged with malignity of heart and an incapacity for friendship. This was the harder, because it was the moral fashion of that day to place friendliness, amiability, the desire to please and to serve, at the very head of all the virtues. The whole correspondence of the time is penetrated to an incomparable degree by a caressing spirit; it is sometimes too elaborate and far-fetched in expression, but it marks a vivid sociability, and even a true humanity, that softens and harmonises the sharpness of men's egotism.

Again, though Diderot himself is not ungenerously handled in the *Confessions*, there are passages about Madame d'Epinay and Madame d'Houdetot which not only stamp Rousseau with ingratitude towards two women who had treated him kindly, but which were calculated to make practical mischief among people still living. All this was atrocious in itself, and the atrocity seemed more black to Diderot than to others, because he had for some years known Madame d'Epinay as a friendly creature, and, above all, because Grimm was her lover. Perhaps we may add among the reasons that stirred him to pen these diatribes, a consciousness of the harm that Rousseau's sentimentalism had done to sound and positive thinking. But this, we may be sure, would be infinitely less potent than the motives that sprang from Diderot's own sentimentalism. The quarrel, for all save a few foolish partisans, is now dead, and we may leave the dust once more to settle thick upon it. Diderot's own way of reading history is not unworthy of imitation, and it is capable of application in spirit to private conduct no less than to the history of great public events. "Does the narrative present me with some fact that dishonours humanity? Then I examine it with the most

rigorous severity; whatever sagacity I may be able to command, I employ in detecting contradictions that throw suspicion on the story. It is not so when an action is beautiful, lofty, noble. Then I never think of arguing against the pleasure that I feel in sharing the name of man with one who has done such an action. I will say more; it is to my heart, and perhaps too it is only conformable to justice, to hazard an opinion that tends to whiten an illustrious personage, in the face of authorities that seem to contradict the tenour of his life, of his doctrine, and of his general repute."[186]

The elaborate outbreak against Rousseau is perhaps Diderot's only breach of what ought thus to be a rule for all magnanimous men. Diderot, or his shade, paid the penalty. La Harpe retaliated for some slight wound to pitiful literary vanity, by a lecture on Seneca in which he raked up all the old accusations against Seneca's champion. La Harpe, for various reasons into which we need not now more particularly enter, got the ear of the European public in the years of reaction after he had himself deserted his old philosophic friends, and gone over to the conservative camp. He found the world eager to listen to all that could be said against men who were believed to have corrupted their age; and his bitter misrepresentations, not seldom invigorated by lies, were the origin of much of the vulgar prejudice that has only begun to melt away in our own generation.

Rousseau died in 1778. The more versatile literary genius of the century had died a couple of months earlier in the same year. It was not until the occasion of Voltaire's triumphant visit to Paris, after an absence of seven-and-twenty years, that he and Diderot at length met. Their correspondence had been less constant and less cordial than was common where Voltaire was concerned; but though their sympathy was imperfect, there was no lack of mutual goodwill and admiration. The poet is said to have done his best to push Diderot into the Academy, but the king was incurably hostile, and Diderot was not anxious for an empty distinction. He had none of that

vanity nor eagerness for recognition — pardonable enough, for that matter — which such distinctions gratify. And he perhaps agreed with Voltaire himself, who said of academies and parliaments that, when men come together, their ears instantly become elongated. After Diderot's return from Russia Voltaire wrote to him: "I am eighty-three years of age, and I repeat that I am inconsolable at the thought of dying without ever having seen you. I have tried to collect around me as many of your children as possible, but I am a long way from having the whole family.... We are not so far apart, at bottom, and it only needs a conversation to bring us to an understanding."[187]

Of such conversations we have almost nothing to tell. No sacred bard has commemorated the salutation of the heroes. We only know that at the end of their first interview Diderot's facility of discourse had been so copious that, after he had taken his leave, Voltaire said: "The man is clever, assuredly; but he lacks one talent, and an essential talent — that of dialogue." Diderot's remark about Voltaire was more picturesque. "He is like one of those old haunted castles, which are falling into ruins in every part; but you easily perceive that it is inhabited by some ancient sorcerer."[188] They had a dispute as to the merits of Shakespeare, and Diderot displeased the patriarch by repeating the expression that we have already quoted (vol. i. p. 330) about Shakespeare being like the statue of St. Christopher at Notre Dame, unshapely and rude, but such a giant that ordinary men could pass between his legs without touching him.[189]

There was one man who might have told us a thousand interesting things both about Diderot's conversations with Voltaire, and his relations with other men. This man was Naigeon, to whom Diderot gave most of his papers, and who always professed, down to his death in 1814, to be Diderot's closest adherent and most authoritative expounder. Diderot was, as he always knew and said, less an author than a talker; not a talker like Johnson, but like Coleridge. If Naigeon could only have contented himself

with playing reporter, and could have been blessed by nature with the rare art of Boswell. “We wanted,” as Carlyle says, “to see and know how it stood with the bodily man, the working and warfaring Denis Diderot; how he looked and lived, what he did, what he said.” Instead of which, nothing but “a dull, sulky, snuffling, droning, interminable lecture on Atheistic Philosophy,” delivered with the vehemence of some pulpit-drumming Gowkthrapple, or “precious Mr. Jabesh Rentowel.” Naigeon belonged to the too numerous class of men and women overabundantly endowed with unwise intellect. He was acute, diligent, and tenacious; fond of books, especially when they had handsome margins and fine bindings; above all things, he was the most fanatical atheist, and the most indefatigable propagandist and eager proselytiser which that form of religion can boast. We do not know the date of his first acquaintance with Diderot;[190] we only know that at the end of Diderot’s days he had no busier or more fervent disciple than Naigeon. To us, at all events, whatever it may have been to Diderot, the acquaintance and discipleship have proved good for very little.

Our last authentic glimpse of Diderot is from the pen of a humane and enlightened Englishman, whose memory must be held in perpetual honour among us. Samuel Romilly, then a young man of four-and-twenty, visited Paris in 1781. He made the acquaintance of the namesake who had written the articles on watch-making in the Encyclopædia, and whose son had written the more famous articles on Toleration and Virtue. By this honest man Romilly was introduced to D’Alembert and Diderot. The former was in weak health and said very little. Diderot, on the contrary, was all warmth and eagerness, and talked to his visitor with as little reserve as if he had been long and intimately acquainted with him. He spoke on politics, religion, and philosophy. He praised the English for having led the way to sound philosophy, but the adventurous genius of the French, he said, had pushed them on before their guides. “You others,” he continued, “mix up

theology with your philosophy; that is to spoil everything, it is to mix up lies with truth; *il faut sabrer la théologie* — we must put theology to the sword." He was ostentatious, Romilly says, of a total disbelief in the existence of a God. He quoted Plato, "the author of all the good theology that ever existed in the world, as saying that there is a vast curtain drawn over the heavens, and that men must content themselves with what passes beneath that curtain, without ever attempting to raise it; and in order to complete my conversion from my unhappy errors, he read me all through a little work of his own" — of which we shall presently speak. On politics he talked very eagerly, "and inveighed with great warmth against the tyranny of the French government. He told me that he had long meditated a work upon the death of Charles the First; that he had studied the trial of that prince; and that his intention was to have tried him over again, and to have sent him to the scaffold if he had found him guilty, but that he had at last relinquished the design. In England he would have executed it, but he had not the courage to do so in France. D'Alembert, as I have observed was more cautious; he contented himself with observing what an effect philosophy had in his own time produced on the minds of the people. The birth of the Dauphin (known afterwards as Lewis XVII., the unhappy prisoner of the Temple) afforded him an example. He was old enough, he said, to remember when such an event had made the whole nation drunk with joy (1729), but now they regarded with great indifference the birth of another master."[191]

It was thus clear to the two veterans of the Encyclopædia that the change for which they had worked was at hand. The press literally teemed with pamphlets, treatises, poems, histories, all shouting from the house-tops open destruction to beliefs which fifty years before were actively protected against so much as a whisper in the closet. Every form of literary art was seized and turned into an instrument in the remorseless attack on *L'Infâme*.

The conservative or religious opposition showed a weakness that is hardly paralleled in the long history of the mighty controversy. Ability, adroitness, vigour, and character were for once all on one side. Palissot was perhaps, after all, the best of the writers on the conservative side.[192] With all his faults, he had the literary sense. Some of what he said was true, and some of the third-rate people whom he assailed deserved the assault. His criticism on Diderot's drama, *The Natural Son*, was not a whit more severe than that bad play demanded.[193] Not seldom in the course of this work we have wished with Palissot that the excellent Diderot were less addicted to prophetic and apocalyptical turns of speech, that there were less of chaos round his points of burning and shining light, and that he had less title to the hostile name of the Lycophron of philosophy.[194] But the comedy of *The Philosophers* was a scandalous misrepresentation, introducing Diderot personally on the stage, and putting into his mouth a mixture of folly and knavery that was as foreign to Diderot as to any one else in the world. In 1782 the satirist again attacked his enemy, now grown old and weary. In *Le Satyrique*, Valère, a spiteful and hypocritical poetaster, is intended partially at least for Diderot. A colporteur, not ill-named as M. Pamphlet, comes to urge payment of his bill.

Daignez avoir égard à mes vives instances. Je suis humilié d'y mettre tant de feu: Mais les temps sont si durs! le comptoir rend si peu! Imprimeur, Colporteur, Relieur, et Libraire, Avec tous ces métiers, je suis dans la misère: Mais j'ai toujours grand soin, malgré ma pauvreté, De ne peser mon gain qu'au poids de l'équité. Vous en allez juger par le susdit mémoire. [*Il prend ses lunettes comme pour lire.*

Valère. (*Avec humeur.*) Eh, monsieur, finissez.

M. Pamphlet. C'est trahir votre gloire Que de vouloir caeher les immortels écrits [*Il lit.*

Dont vous êtes l'auteur. *Les Boudoirs de Paris, On Journal des Abbés. L'Espion des Coulisses,* Ouvrage assez piquant sur les mœurs des actrices.

And the intention of the pleasantry is pointed by a malicious footnote, to the effect that people who might be surprised that a serious man like Valère should have written works of this licentious and frivolous kind, will conceive that in a moment of leisure a philosopher should write *Les Bijoux Indiscrèts*, for instance, and the next day follow it by a treatise on morality,[195] — as Diderot unhappily had done.

Palissot was not so good as Molière, Boileau, and Pope, as he was fatuous enough to suppose; but he was certainly better than the scribbler who asked —

Mais enfin de quoi se glorifie Ce siècle de mollesse et de Philosophie? Dites-moi: le Français a-t-il un cœur plus franc Plus prodigue à l'état de son généreux sang, Plus ardent à venger la plaintive innocence Contre l'iniquité que soutient la puissance? Le Français philosophe est-il plus respecté Pour la foi, la candeur, l'exacte probité? Où sont-ils ces Héros, ces vertueux modèles Que l'Encyclopédie a couvé sous ses ailes?[196]

Tiresome doggrel of this kind was the strongest retort that the party of obscurantism could muster against the vigour, grace, and sparkle of Voltaire.

The great official champions of the old system were not much wiser than their hacks in the press. The churchmen were given over to a blind mind. The great edition of Voltaire's works which Beaumarchais was printing over the frontier at Kehl, excited their anger to a furious pitch. The infamous Cardinal de Rohan, archbishop of Strasburg (1781), denounced the publication as sacrilege. The archbishop of Paris (1785) thundered against the monument of scandal and the work of darkness. The archbishop of Vienne forbade the faithful of his diocese to subscribe to it under pain of

mortal sin. In the general assembly of the clergy which opened in the summer of 1780, the bishops, in memorials to the king, deplored the homage paid to the famous writer who was "less known for the beauty of his genius and the superiority of his talents, than for the persevering and implacable war which for sixty years he had waged against the Lord and his Christ." They cursed in solemn phrase the "revolting blasphemies" of Raynal's *History of the Indies*, and declared that the publication of a new edition of that celebrated book with the name and the portrait of its author, showed that the most elementary notions of shame and decency lay in profound sleep.

In the midst of those prolonged cries of distress, we have no word of recognition that the only remedy for a moral disease is a moral remedy. The single resource that occurred to their debilitated souls was the familiar armoury of suppression, menace, violence, and tyranny. "Sire," they cried, "it is time to put a term to this deplorable lethargy." They reminded the king of the declaration of 1757, which inflicted on all persons who printed or circulated writings hostile to religion, the punishment of death. But "their paternal bowels shuddered at the sight of these severe enactments;" all that they sought was plenty of rigorous imprisonment, ruinous fining, and diligent espionage.[197] If the reader is revolted by the rashness of Diderot's expectation of the speedy decay of the belief in a God,[198] he may well be equally revolted by the obstinate infatuation of the men who expected to preserve the belief in a God by the spies of the department of police. Much had no doubt been done for the church in past times by cruelty and oppression, but the folly of the French bishops, after the reign of Voltaire and the apostolate of the Encyclopædia, lay exactly in their blindness to the fact that the old methods were henceforth impossible in France, and impossible for ever. How can we wonder at the hatred and contempt felt by

men of the social intelligence of Diderot and D'Alembert for this desperate union of impotence and malignity?

The band of the precursors was rapidly disappearing. Grimm and Holbach, Catherine and Frederick, still survived.[199] D'Alembert, tended to the last hour by Condorcet with the lovable reverence of a son, died at the end of October 1783. Turgot, gazing with eyes of astonished sternness on a society hurrying incorrigibly with joyful speed along the path of destruction, had passed away two years before (1781). Voltaire, the great intellectual director of Europe for fifty years, and Rousseau, the great emotional reactionist, had both, as we know, died in 1778. The little companies in which, from Adrienne Lecouvreur, the Marquise de Lambert, and Madame de Tencin, in the first half of the century, groups of intelligent men and women had succeeded in founding informal schools of disinterested opinion, and in finally removing the centre of criticism and intellectual activity from Versailles to Paris, had now nearly all come to an end. Madame du Deffand died in 1780, Madame Geoffrin in 1779, and in 1776 Mdlle. Lespinasse, whose letters will long survive her, as giving a burning literary note to the vagueness of suffering and pain of soul. One of Diderot's favourite companions in older days, Galiani, the antiquary, the scholar, the politician, the incomparable mimic, the shrewdest, wittiest, and gayest of men after Voltaire, was feeling the dull grasp of approaching death under his native sky at Naples. Galiani's *Dialogues on the Trade in Grain* (1769-70) contained, under that most unpromising title, a piece of literature which for its verve, rapidity, wit, dialectical subtlety, and real strength of thought, has hardly been surpassed by masterpieces of a wider recognition. Voltaire vowed that Plato and Molière must have combined to produce a book that was as amusing as the best of romances, and as instructive as the best of serious books. Diderot, who had a hand in retouching the *Dialogues* for the press,[200] went so far as to pronounce them worthy of a place along

with the *Provincial Letters* of Pascal, and declared that, like those immortal pieces, Galiani's dialogues would remain as a model of perfection in their own kind, long after both the subject and the personages concerned had lost their interest.[201] The prophecy has not come quite true, for the world is busy, and heedless, and much the prey of accident and capricious tradition in the books that it reads. Yet even now, although Galiani was probably wrong on the special issue between himself and the economists, it would be well if people would turn to his demolition, as wise as witty, of the doctrine of absolute truths in political economy. Galiani's constant correspondent was Madame d'Epinay, the kindly benefactress of Rousseau a quarter of a century earlier, the friend of Diderot, the more than friend of Grimm. In 1783 she died, and either in that year or the next, Mademoiselle Voland, who had filled so great a space in the life of Diderot. The ghosts and memories of his friends became the majority, and he consoled himself that he should not long survive.

The days of intellectual excitement and philanthropic hope seemed at their very height, but in fact they were over. "Nobody," said Talleyrand, "who has not lived before 1789, knows how sweet life can be." The old world had its last laugh over the *Marriage of Figaro* (April 1784), but in the laugh of Figaro there is a strange ring. Under all its gaiety, its liveliness, its admirable *naïveté*, was something sombre. It was pregnant with menace. Its fooling was the ironical enforcement of Raynal's trenchant declaration that "the law is nothing, if it be not a sword gliding indistinctly over the heads of all, and striking down whatever rises above the horizontal plane along which it moves."

Diderot himself is commonly accused of having fomented an atrocious spirit by the horrible couplet —

Et ses mains ourdiraient les entrailles du prêtre, Au défaut d'un cordon pour étrangler les rois.[202]

That the verses could have actually excited the spirit of the Terrorists is impossible, for they were not given to the world until 1795. And in the second place, so far as Diderot's intention is concerned, any one who reads the piece from which the lines are taken, will perceive that the whole performance is in a vein of playful phantasy, and that the particular verses are placed dramatically in the mouth of a proclaimed Eleutheromane, or maniac for liberty.[203] Diderot was not likely to foresee that what he designed for an illustration of the frenzy of the Pindaric dithyramb, would so soon be mistaken for a short formula of practical politics.[204]

In 1780 his townsmen of Langres paid him a compliment, which showed that the sage was not without honour in his own country. They besought him to sit for his portrait, to be placed among the worthies in the town hall. Diderot replied by sending them Houdon's bronze bust, which was received with all distinction and honour. Naigeon hints that in the last years of his life Diderot paid more attention to money than he had ever done before;[205] not that he became a miser, but because, like many other persons, he had not found out until the close of a life's experience that care of money really means care of the instrument that procures some of the best ends in life. For a moment we may regret that he was too much occupied in attending to his affairs to take the unwise Naigeon's wise counsel, that he should devote himself to a careful revision of all that he had written. Perhaps Diderot's instinct was right. Among the distractions of old age, he had turned back to his Letter on the Blind, and read it over again without partiality. He found, as was natural, some defects in a piece that was written three-and-thirty years before, but he abstained from attempting to remove them, for fear that the page of the young man should be made the worse by the retouching of the old man. "There comes a time," he reflects, "when taste gives counsels

whose justice you recognise, but which you have no longer strength to follow. It is the pusillanimity that springs from consciousness of weakness, or else it is the idleness that is one of the results of weakness and pusillanimity, which disgusts me with a task that would be more likely to hurt than to improve my work.

Solve senescentem mature sanus equum, ne Peccet ad extremum ridendus et ilia ducat."

And so he contented himself with some rough notes of phenomena that were corroborative of the speculation of his youth.[206]

In the early spring of 1784 Diderot had an attack which he knew to be the presage of the end. Dropsy set in, and he lingered until the summer. The priest of Saint Sulpice, the centre of the philosophic quarter, came to visit him two or three times a week, hoping to achieve at least the semblance of a conversion. Diderot did not encourage conversation on theology, but when pressed he did not refuse it. One day when they found, as two men of sense will always find, that they had ample common ground in matters of morality and good works, the priest ventured to hint that an exposition of such excellent maxims, accompanied by a slight retractation of Diderot's previous works, would have a good effect on the world. "I daresay it would, monsieur le curé, but confess that I should be acting an impudent lie." And no word of retractation was ever made. As the end came suddenly, the priest escaped from the necessity of denying the funeral rites of the Church.

For thirty years Diderot had been steadfast to his quarters on an upper floor in the Rue Taranne, and even now, when the physicians told him that to climb such length of staircase was death to him, he still could not be induced to stir. It would have been easier, his daughter says, to effect a removal from Versailles itself. Grimm at length asked the Empress of Russia to provide a house for her librarian, and when the request was conceded, Diderot, who could never be ungracious, allowed himself to be

taken from his garret to palatial rooms in the Rue de Richelieu. He enjoyed them less than a fortnight. Though visibly growing weaker every day, he did all that he could to cheer the people around him, and amused himself and them by arranging his pictures and his books. In the evening, to the last, he found strength to converse on science and philosophy to the friends who were eager as ever for the last gleanings of his prolific intellect. In the last conversation that his daughter heard him carry on, his last words were the pregnant aphorism that *the first step towards philosophy is incredulity*.

On the evening of the 30th of July 1784 he sat down to table, and at the end of the meal took an apricot. His wife, with kindly solicitude, remonstrated. *Mais quel diable de mal veux-tu que cela me fasse?* he said, and ate the apricot. Then he rested his elbow on the table, trifling with some sweetmeats. His wife asked him a question; on receiving no answer, she looked up and saw that he was dead. He had died as the Greek poet says that men died in the golden age — θνησκον δ’ ὡς ὑπνω δεδμενοι, *they passed away as if mastered by sleep*. It had always been his opinion that an examination of the organs after death is a useful practice, and his wish that the operation should take place in his own case was respected. Nothing interesting or remarkable was revealed, and his remains were laid in the vaults of the church of Saint Roche.

So the curtain fell upon this strange tragi-comedy of a man of letters. There is no better epilogue than words of his own:— “We fix our gaze on the ruins of a triumphal arch, of a portico, a pyramid, a temple, a palace, and we return upon ourselves. All is annihilated, perishes, passes away. It is only the world that remains; only time that endures. I walk between two eternities. To whatever side I turn my eyes, the objects that surround me tell of an end, and teach me resignation to my own end. What is my ephemeral existence in comparison with that of the crumbling rock and the decaying forest? I see the marble of the tomb falling to dust, and yet I cannot bear to

die! Am I to grudge a feeble tissue of fibres and flesh to a general law, that executes itself inexorably even on very bronze!”

CHAPTER IX. CONCLUSION.

A FEW MORE pages must be given to one or two of Diderot's writings which have not hitherto been mentioned. An exhaustive survey of his works is out of the question, nor would any one be repaid for the labour of criticism. A mere list of the topics that he handled would fill a long chapter. A redaction of a long treatise on harmony, a vast sheaf of notes on the elements of physiology, a collection of miscellanea on the drama, a still more copious collection of miscellanea on a hundred points in literature and art, a fragment on the exercise of young Russians, an elaborate plan of studies for a proposed Russian University, — no less panurgic and less encyclopædic a critic than Diderot himself could undertake to sweep with ever so light a wing over this vast area. Everybody can find something to say about the collection of tales, in which Diderot thought that he was satirising the manners of his time, after the fashion of Rabelais, Montaigne, La Mothe-le-Vayer, and Swift. But not everybody is competent to deal, for instance, with the five memoirs on different subjects in mathematics (1748), with which Diderot hoped to efface the scandal of his previous performance.

I.

Decidedly the most important of the pieces of which we have not yet spoken must be counted the *Thoughts on the Interpretation of Nature* (1754). His study of Bacon and the composition of the introductory prospectus of the Encyclopædia had naturally filled Diderot's mind with ideas about the universe as a whole. The great problem of man's knowledge of this universe, — the limits, the instruments, the meaning of such

knowledge, came before him with a force that he could not evade. Maupertuis had in 1751, under the assumed name of Baumann, an imaginary doctor of Erlangen, published a dissertation on the *Universal System of Nature*, in which he seems to have maintained that the mechanism of the universe is one and the same throughout, modifying itself, or being modified by some vital element within, in an infinity of diverse ways.[207] Leibnitz's famous idea, of making nature invariably work with the minimum of action, was seized by Maupertuis, expressed as the Law of Thrift, and made the starting-point of speculations that led directly to Holbach and the *System of Nature*.[208] The *Loi d'Epargne* evidently tended to make unity of all the forces of the universe the keynote or the goal of philosophical inquiry. At this time of his life, Diderot resisted Maupertuis's theory of the unity of vital force in the universe, or perhaps we should rather say that he saw how open it was to criticism. His resistance has none of his usual air of vehement conviction. However that may be, the theory excited his interest, and fitted in with the train of meditation which his thoughts about the Encyclopædia had already set in motion, and of which the *Pensées Philosophiques* of 1746 were the cruder prelude.

The *Thoughts on the Interpretation of Nature* are, in form as in title, imitated from those famous *Aphorismi de Interpretatione Naturæ et Regni Hominis*, which are more shortly known to all men as Bacon's *Novum Organum*.[209] The connection between the aphorisms is very loosely held. Diderot began by premising that he would let his thoughts follow one another under his pen, in the order in which the subjects came up in his mind; and he kept his word. Their general scope, so far as it is capable of condensed expression, may be described as a reconciliation between the two great classes into which Diderot found thinkers upon Nature to be divided; those who have many instruments and few ideas, and those who have few instruments and many ideas, — in other words, between men of

science without philosophy, and philosophers without knowledge of experimental science.

In the region of science itself, again, Diderot foresees as great a change as in the relations between science and philosophy. “We touch the moment of a great revolution in the sciences. From the strong inclination of men’s minds towards morals, literature, the history of nature and experimental physics, I would almost venture to assert that before the next hundred years are over, there will not be three great geometers to be counted in Europe. This science will stop short where the Bernouillis, the Eulers, the Maupertuis, the Clairauts, the Fontaines, the D’Alemberts, the Lagranges have left it. They will have fixed the Pillars of Hercules. People will go no further.” Those who have read Comte’s angry denunciations of the perversions of geometry by means of algebra, and of the waste of intellectual force in modern analysis,[210] will at least understand how such a view as Diderot’s was possible. And no one will be likely to deny that, whether or not the pillars of the geometrical Hercules were finally set a hundred years ago, the great discoveries of the hundred years since Diderot have been, as he predicted, in the higher sciences. The great misfortune of France was that the supremacy of geometry coincided with the opening of the great era of political discussion. The definitions of Montesquieu’s famous book, which opened the political movement in literature, have been shown to be less those of a jurisconsult than of a geometer.[211] Social truths, with all their profound complexity, were handled like propositions in Euclid, and logical deductions from arbitrary premises were treated as accurate representations of real circumstance. The repulse of geometry to its proper rank came too late.

Comte always liberally recognised Diderot’s genius, and any reader of Comte’s views on the necessities of subjective synthesis will discern the germ of that doctrine in the following remarkable section:

“When we compare the infinite multitude of the phenomena of nature with the limits of our understandings and the weakness of our organs, can we ever expect anything else from the slowness of our work, from the long and frequent interruptions, and from the rarity of creative genius than a few broken and separated pieces of the great chain that binds all things together? Experimental philosophy might work for centuries of centuries, and the materials that it had heaped up, finally reaching in their number beyond all combination, would still be far removed from an exact enumeration. How many volumes would it not need to contain the mere terms by which we should designate the distinct collections of phenomena, if the phenomena were known? When will the philosophic language be complete? If it were complete, who among men would be able to know it? If the Eternal, to manifest his power still more plainly than by the marvels of nature, had deigned to develop the universal mechanism on pages traced by his own hand, do you suppose that this great book would be more comprehensible to us than the universe itself? How many pages of it all would have been intelligible to the philosopher who, with all the force of head that had been conferred upon him, was not sure of having grasped all the conclusions by which an old geometer determined the relation of the sphere to the cylinder? We should have in such pages a fairly good measure of the reach of men’s minds, and a still more pungent satire on our vanity. We should say, Fermat went to such a page, Archimedes went a few pages further.

“What then is our end? The execution of a work that can never be achieved, and which would be far beyond human intelligence if it were achieved. Are we not more insensate than the first inhabitants of the plain of Shinar? We know the immeasurable distance between the earth and the heavens, and still we insist on rearing our tower.

“But can we presume that there will not come a time when our pride will abandon the work in discouragement? What appearance is there that,

narrowly lodged and ill at its ease here below, our pride should obstinately persist in constructing an uninhabitable palace beyond the earth's atmosphere? Even if it should so insist, would it not be arrested by the confusion of tongues, which is already only too perceptible and too inconvenient in natural history? Besides, it is utility that circumscribes all. It will be utility that in a few centuries will set bounds to experimental physics, as it is on the eve of setting bounds to geometry. I grant centuries to this study, because the sphere of its utility is infinitely more extensive than that of any abstract science, and it is without contradiction the base of our real knowledge."[212]

We cannot wonder that when Comte drew up his list of the hundred and fifty volumes that should form the good Positivist's library in the nineteenth century, he should have placed Diderot's *Interpretation of Nature* on one side of Descartes' *Discourse on Method*, with Bacon's *Novum Organum* on the other.

The same spirit finds even stronger and more distinct expression in a later aphorism:— "Since the reason cannot understand everything, imagination foresee everything, sense observe everything, nor memory retain everything; since great men are born at such remote intervals, and the progress of science is so interrupted by revolution, that whole ages of study are passed in recovering the knowledge of the centuries that are gone, — to observe everything in nature without distinction is to fail in duty to the human race. Men who are beyond the common run in their talents ought to respect themselves and posterity in the employment of their time. What would posterity think of us if we had nothing to transmit to it save a complete insectology, an immense history of microscopic animals? No — to the great geniuses great objects, little objects to the little geniuses" (§ 54).

Diderot, while thus warning inquirers against danger on one side, was alive to the advantages of stubborn and unlimited experiment on the other. "When you have formed in your mind," he says, "one of those systems which require to be verified by experience, you ought neither to cling to it obstinately nor abandon it lightly. People sometimes think their conjectures false, when they have not taken the proper measures to find them true. Obstinacy, even, has fewer drawbacks than the opposite excess. By multiplying experiments, if you do not find what you want, it may happen that you will come on something better. *Never is time employed in interrogating nature entirely lost*" (§ 42). The reader will not fail to observe that this maxim is limited by the condition of verifiableness. Of any system that could not be verified by experience Diderot would have disdained to speak in connection with the interpretation of nature.

This, of course, did not prevent him from hypothesis and prophecy which he himself had not the means of justifying. For example, he said that just as in mathematics, by examining all properties of a curve we find that they are one and the same property presented under different faces, so in nature when experimental physics are more advanced, people will recognise that all the phenomena, whether of weight, or elasticity, or magnetism, or electricity, are only different sides of the same affection (§ 44). But he was content to leave it to posterity, and to build no fabric on unproved propositions.

In the same scientific spirit he penetrated the hollowness of every system dealing with Final Causes:

"The physicist, whose profession is to instruct and not to edify, will abandon the *Why*, and will busy himself only with the *How*.... How many absurd ideas, false suppositions, chimerical notions in those hymns which some rash defenders of final causes have dared to compose in honour of the Creator? Instead of sharing the transports of admiration of the prophet, and

crying out at the sight of the unnumbered stars that light up the midnight sky, *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handiwork*, they have given themselves up to the superstition of their conjectures. Instead of adoring the All-Powerful in the creation of nature, they have prostrated themselves before the phantoms of their imagination. If any one doubts the justice of my reproach, I invite him to compare Galen's treatise on the use of parts of the human body, with the physiology of Boerhaave, and the physiology of Boerhaave with that of Haller; I invite posterity to compare the systematic or passing views of Haller with what will be the physiology of future times. Man praises the Eternal for his own poor views; and the Eternal who hears from the elevation of his throne, and who knows his own design, accepts the silly praise and smiles at man's vanity" (§ 56).

The world has advanced rapidly along this path since Diderot's day, and has opened out many new and unsuspected meanings by the way. Perhaps the advance has been less satisfactory in working out, in a scientific way, the philosophy that is implied in the following adaptation of the Leibnitzian and Maupertuisian suggestion of the law of economy in natural forces:—"Astonishment often comes from our supposing several marvels, where in truth there is only one; from our imagining in nature as many particular acts as we can count phenomena, whilst *nature has perhaps in reality never produced more than one single act*. It seem even that, if nature had been under the necessity of producing several acts, the different results of such acts would be isolated; that there would be collections of phenomena independent of one another, and that the general chain of which philosophy assumes the continuity, would break in many places. *The absolute independence of a single fact is incompatible with the idea of an All; and without the idea of a Whole, there can be no Philosophy*" (§ 11).

At length Diderot concludes by a series of questions which he thinks that philosophers may perhaps count worthy of discussion. What is the difference, for example, between living matter and dead? Does the energy of a living molecule vary by itself, or according to the quantity, the quality, the forms of the dead or living matter with which it is united? We need not continue the enumeration, because Diderot himself suddenly brings them to an end with a truly admirable expression of his sense of how unworthy they are of the attention of serious men, who are able to measure the difference between a wise and beneficent use of intelligence, and a foolish and wasteful misuse of it. “When I turn my eyes,” he says, “to the works of men, and see the cities that are built on every side, all the elements yoked to our service, languages fixed, nations civilised, harbours constructed, lands and skies measured — then the world seems to me very old. When I find man uncertain as to the first principles of medicine and agriculture, as to the properties of the commonest substances, as to knowledge of the maladies that afflict him, as to the pruning of trees, as to the best form for the plough, then it seems as if the earth had only been inhabited yesterday. And if men were wise, they would at last give themselves up to such inquiries as bear on their wellbeing, and would not take the trouble to answer my futile questions for a thousand years at the very soonest; or perhaps, even, considering the very scanty extent that they occupy in space and time, they would never deign to answer them at all.”

II.

In 1769 Diderot composed three dialogues, of which he said that, with a certain mathematical memoir, they were the only writings of his own with which he was contented. The first is a dialogue between himself and D’Alembert; the second is D’Alembert’s Dream, in which D’Alembert in his sleep continues the discussion, while Mdlle. Lespinasse, who is

watching by his bedside, takes down the dreamer's words; in the third, Mdlle. Lespinasse and the famous physician, Bordeu, conclude the matter.[213] It is impossible, Diderot said to Mdlle. Voland, to be more profound and more mad: it is at once a supreme extravagance, and the most deep-reaching philosophy. He congratulated himself on the cleverness of placing his ideas in the mouth of a man who dreams, on the ground that we must often give to wisdom the air of madness, in order to secure admittance. Mdlle. Lespinasse was not so complacent. She made D'Alembert insist that the dialogue should be destroyed, and Diderot believed that he had burned the only existing copy. As a matter of fact, the manuscript was not published until 1830, when all the people concerned had long been reduced to dust. There are five or six pages, Diderot said to Mdlle. Voland, which would make your sister's hair stand on end. A man may be much less squeamish than Mdlle. Voland's sister, and still pronounce the imaginative invention of D'Alembert's Dream, and the sequel, to be as odious as anything since the freaks of filthy Diogenes in his tub. Two remarks may be made on this strange production. First, Diderot never intended the dialogues for the public eye. He would have been as shocked as the Archbishop of Paris himself, if he had supposed that they would become accessible to everybody who knows how to read. Second, though they are in form the most ugly and disgusting piece in the literature of philosophy, they testify in their own way to Diderot's sincerity of interest in his subject. Science is essentially unsparing and unblushing, and D'Alembert's Dream plunged exactly into those parts of physiology which are least fit to be handled in literature. The attempt to give an air of polite comedy to functions and secretions must be pronounced detestable, in spite of the dialectical acuteness and force with which Diderot pressed his point.

It would be impossible, in a book not exclusively designed for a public of professors, to give a full account of these three dialogues. It is

indispensable to describe their drift, because it is here that Diderot figures definitely as a materialist. Diderot was in no sense the originator of the French materialism of the eighteenth century. He was preceded by Maupertuis, by Robinet, and by La Mettrie; and we have already seen that when he composed the Thoughts on the Interpretation of Nature (1754), he did not fully accept Maupertuis's materialistic thesis. Lange has shown that at a very early period in the movement the most consistent materialism was ready and developed, while such leaders of the movement as Voltaire and Diderot still leaned either on deism, or on a mixture of deism and scepticism.[214] The philosophy of D'Alembert's Dream is definite enough, and far enough removed alike from deism and scepticism.

"The thinking man is like a musical instrument. Suppose a clavecin to have sensibility and memory, and then say whether it would not repeat of itself the airs that you have played on its keys. We are instruments endowed with sensibility and memory. Our senses are so many keys, pressed by the nature that surrounds them, and they often press one another; and this, according to my judgment, is all that passes in a clavecin organised as you and I are organised.

"There is only one substance in the world. The marble of the statue makes the flesh of the man, and conversely. Reduce a block of marble to impalpable powder; mix this powder with humus, or vegetable earth; knead them well together; water the mixture; let it rot for a year, two years — time does not count. In this you sow the plant, the plant nourishes the man, and hence the passage from marble to tissue.

"Do you see this egg? With that you overturn all the schools of theology and all the temples of the earth. It is an insensible mass before the germ is introduced into it; and, after the germ is introduced, there is still an insensible mass, for the germ itself is only an inert fluid. How does this mass pass to another organisation, to life, to sensibility? By heat. What will

produce heat? Movement. What will be the successive effects of movement? First, an oscillating point, a thread that extends, the flesh, the beak, and so forth."

Then follows the application of the same ideas to the reproduction of man — a region whither it is not convenient to follow the physiological inquirer. The result as to the formation of the organic substance in man is as unflinching as the materialism of Büchner.

But doctor, cries Mdlle. Lespinasse, what becomes of vice and virtue? Virtue, that word so holy in all languages, that idea so sacred among all nations?

Bordeu. We must transform it into beneficence, and its opposite into the idea of maleficence. A man is happily or unhappily born; people are irresistibly drawn on by the general torrent that conducts one to glory, the other to ignominy.

Mdlle. Lespinasse. And self-esteem, and shame, and remorse?

Bordeu. Proclivities, founded on the ignorance or the vanity of a being who imputes to himself the merit or the demerit of a necessary instant.

Mdlle. Lespinasse. And rewards and punishments?

Bordeu. Means of correcting the modifiable being that we call bad, and encouraging the other that we call good.[215]

The third dialogue we must leave. The fact that German books are written for a public of specialists allows Dr. Rosenkranz to criticise these dialogues with a freedom equal to Diderot's own, and his criticism is as full as usual of candour, patience, and weight. An English writer must be content to pass on, and his contentment may well be considerable, for the subject is perhaps that on which, above all others, it is most difficult to say any wise word.

III.

The Plan of a University for the Government of Russia was the work of Diderot's last years, but no copy of it was given to the public before 1813-14, when M. Guizot published extracts from an autograph manuscript confided to him by Suard. Diderot, with a characteristic respect for competence, with which no egotism can ever interfere in minds of such strength and veracity as his, began by urging the Empress to consult Ernesti of Leipsic, the famous editor of Cicero, and no less famous in his day (1707-1781) for the changes that he introduced into the system of teaching in the German universities. Of Oxford and Cambridge Diderot spoke more kindly than they then deserved.

The one strongly marked idea of the plan is what might have been expected from the editor of the Encyclopædia, namely, the elevation of what the Germans call real or technological instruction, and the banishment of pure literature as a subject of study from the first to the last place in the course. In the faculty of arts the earliest course begins with arithmetic, algebra, the calculation of probabilities, and geometry. Next follow physics and mechanics. Then astronomy. Fourthly, natural history and experimental physics. In the fifth class, chemistry and anatomy. In the sixth, logic and grammar. In the seventh, the language of the country. And it was not until the eighth, that Greek and Latin, eloquence and poetry, took their place among the objects or instruments of education. Parallel with this course, the student was to follow the first principles of metaphysics, of universal morality, and of natural and revealed religion. Here, too, history and geography had a place. In a third parallel, perspective and drawing accompanied the science of the first, and the philosophy and history of the second.

In the thorny field of religious instruction, Diderot expresses no opinion of his own, beyond saying that it is natural for the Empress's subjects to conform to her way of thinking. As her majesty thinks that the fear of pains

to come has much influence on men's actions, and is persuaded that the total of small daily advantages produced by belief outweighs the total of evils wrought by sectarianism and intolerance, therefore students ought to be instructed in the mystery of the distinction of the two substances, in the immortality of the soul, and so forth.[216]

There is a story that one evening at St. Petersburg, Diderot was declaiming with stormy eloquence against the baseness of those who flatter kings; for such, he said, there ought to be a deeper and a fiercer hell. "Tell me, Diderot," said the Empress by and by, "what they say in Paris about the death of my husband." Instead of telling her the plain truth that everybody said that Peter had been murdered by her orders, the philosopher poured out a stream of the smoothest things. "Come now," said Catherine suddenly, "confess, if you are not walking along the path that leads to your deep hell, you are certainly coming very close to purgatory." Diderot's elaborate concessions to her majesty's political religion would, it is to be feared, have brought him still further in the same sulphureous track.

As we have often had to bewail Diderot's diffuseness, it is as well to remark that a long passage in the sketch of which we are speaking shows how close and concentrated he could be upon occasion. The two pages in which he demolishes the incorrigible superstition about Latin and Greek,[217] contain a thoroughly exhaustive summary of all the arguments and the answers. In the immense discussion about Latin and Greek that has taken place in the hundred years since Diderot's time, it is tolerably safe to say that not a single point has been brought forward which Diderot did not in these most pithy and conclusive pages attempt to deal with. He winds up with the position that, even for the man of letters, the present system of teaching Latin and Greek is essentially sterile. I am perfectly sure, he says, that Voltaire, who is not exactly a mediocrity as a man of letters, knows

extremely little Greek, and that he is not twentieth nor even hundredth among the Latinists of the day.[218]

Following this sketch is printed a letter to the Countess of Forbach on the education of children. It is full of rich wisdom on its special subject. Nobody can read it without feeling that quality in Diderot which made his friends love him. And we see how, when he was called to practical counsel, he banished into their own sphere the explosive paradoxes with which he delighted to amuse his hours of speculative dreaming.

IV.

Romilly has told us that Diderot was bent on converting him from the error of his religious ways, and with that intention read to him a Conversation with the Maréchale de —— .[219] It is believed to be an idealised version of a real conversation with Madame de Broglie, and was first printed, almost as soon as written (1777), in the correspondence in which Métra, in imitation of Grimm, informed a circle of foreign subscribers what was going on in Paris. The admirers of Diderot profess to look on this Conversation as one of the most precious pearls in his philosophic casket. It turns upon the conditions of belief and unbelief, represented by the two interlocutors respectively, and is a terse and graphic summary of the rationalistic objections to the creed of the church. The most conspicuous literary passage in it is a parable which has been attributed to Rousseau, but with which Rousseau had really nothing to do, beyond reproducing the spirit of its argument in the ever famous creed of the Savoyard Vicar.

A young Mexican, tired of his work, was sauntering one day on the seashore. He spied a plank, with one end resting on the land, and the other dipping into the water. He sat down on the plank, and there gazing over the vast space that lay spread out before him, he said to himself: “It is certain that my old grandmother is talking nonsense, with her history of I know not

what inhabitants, who, at I know not what time, landed here from I know not where, from some country far beyond our seas. It is against common sense: do I not see the ocean touch the line of the sky? And can I believe, against the evidence of my senses, an old fable of which nobody knows the date, which everybody arranges according to his fancy, and which is only a tissue of absurdities, about which people are ready to tear out one another's eyes." As he was reasoning in this way, the waters rocked him gently on his plank, and he fell asleep. As he slept, the wind rose, the waves carried away the plank on which he was stretched out, and behold our youthful reasoner embarked on a voyage.

La Maréchale. — Alas, that is the image of all of us; we are each on our plank; the wind blows, and the flood carries us away.

C. — He was already far from the mainland when he awoke. No one was ever so surprised as our young Mexican, to find himself out on the open sea, and he was mightily surprised, too, when having lost from sight the shore on which he had been idly walking only an instant before, he saw the sea touching the line of the sky on every side. Then he began to suspect that he might have been mistaken, and that, if the wind remained in the same quarter, perhaps he would be borne to that very shore and among those dwellers on it, about whom his grandmother had so often told him.

La Maréchale. — And of his anxiety you say nothing.

C. — He had none. He said to himself: "What does it matter, provided that I find land? I have reasoned like a giddy-pate, granted; but I have been sincere with myself, and that is all that can be required of me. If it is no virtue to have understanding, at any rate it is no crime to be without it." Meanwhile the wind continued, the man and the plank floated on, and the unknown shore came into sight. He touched it, and behold him again on land.

La Maréchale. — Ah, we shall all of us see one another there, one of these days.

C. — I hope so, madam; wherever it may be, I shall always be very proud to pay you my homage. Hardly had he quitted his plank, and put his foot on the sand, when he perceived a venerable old man standing by his side. He asked him where he was, and to whom he had the honour of speaking. “I am the sovereign of the country,” replied the old man; “you have denied my existence?”— “Yes, it is true.”— “And that of my empire?”— “It is true!”— “I forgive you, because I am he who sees the bottom of all hearts, and I have read at the bottom of yours that you are of good faith; but the rest of your thoughts and your actions are not equally innocent.” Then the old man, who held him by the ear, recalled to him all the errors of his life; and as each was mentioned, the young Mexican bowed himself upon the ground, beat his breast, and besought forgiveness.

V.

Of Falconet,[220] we have already spoken, as a sculptor of genius, and as one of Diderot’s most intimate friends. Writing to Sophie Voland (Nov. 21, 1765), Diderot informs her that some pleasantries of Falconet’s have induced him to undertake very seriously the defence of the sentiment of immortality and respect for posterity.[221] This apology was carried on in an energetic correspondence which lasted from the end of 1765 to 1767. Falconet’s letters were burned by his grand-daughter for reasons unknown, and we have only such passages from them as are more specially referred to by Diderot himself. Falconet flattered himself that he had the best of the argument, and was eager that they should be published, but Diderot was sluggish or busy. The correspondence was imparted to Catherine of Russia, who took a lively interest in it, and to some others, but it was not given to the public — and then only partially — until 1830.

Diderot's position in these twelve letters may be described in general terms as being that the sentiment of immortality and respect for posterity move the heart and elevate the soul; they are two germs of great things, two promises as solid as any other, and two delights as real as most of the delights of life, but more noble, more profitable, and more virtuous. What Diderot means by immortality is not the religious dogma, that the individual personality will be objectively preserved and prolonged in some other mode of existence. On the contrary, it was his disbelief in this dogma of the churches that gave a certain keenness to his pleading for that other kind of immortality, which prolongs our personality only in the grateful and admiring memories of other people who come after us. He intended by the sentiment of immortality "the desire to surround one's name with lustre among posterity; to be the admiration and the talk of centuries to come; to obtain after death the same honours as we pay to those who have gone before us; to furnish a fine line to the historian; to inscribe one's own name by the side of those which we never pronounce without shedding a tear, heaving a sigh, or being touched by regret; to secure for ourselves the blessings that we have such a thrill in bestowing on Sully, Henry IV., and all the other benefactors of the human race."[222] The sphere that surrounds us, and in which the world admires us, the time in which we exist and listen to praise, the number of those who directly address to us the eulogy that we have deserved of them — all this is too small for the capacity of our ambitious souls. By the side of those whom we see prostrated before us, we place those who are not yet in the world. It is only this uncounted throng of adorers that can satisfy a mind whose impulses are ever towards the infinite. At night it is sweet to hear a distant concert, of which only snatches reach the ear, all to be bound into a melodious whole by the imagination, which is all the more charmed as the work is in the main its own. Even if all this were but the sweetness of a lovely dream, is then the sweetness of a dream

as nothing? And am I to count for nothing a sweet dream that lasts as long as my life, and holds me in perpetual intoxication?

Falconet's answer was hard and positive. Contemporary glory suffices. What is fame, if I am not there to enjoy? The fear of contempt and disgrace is as strong a motive as you need, to incite men to great work. Glory after death is chimerical and uncertain. Think of all the great names that are clean forgotten, of all the great workers whose achievements are lost or effaced, of all the others whose works are attributed to those who did not execute them! Your posterity is no better than a lottery.

No, cries Diderot, with redoubled eloquence, rising to his noblest height,[223] "the present is an indivisible point that cuts in two the length of an infinite line. It is impossible to rest on this point and to glide gently along with it, never looking on in front, and never turning the head to gaze behind. The more man ascends through the past, and the more he launches into the future — the greater he will be.... And all these philosophers, and ministers, and truth-telling men, who have fallen victims to the stupidity of nations, the atrocities of priests, the fury of tyrants, what consolation was left for them in death? This, that prejudice would pass, and that posterity would pour out the vial of ignominy upon their enemies. O posterity, holy and sacred! Stay of the unhappy and the oppressed, thou who art just, thou who art incorruptible, who avengest the good man, who unmaskest the hypocrite, who draggest down the tyrant, may thy sure faith, thy consoling faith, never, never abandon me! Posterity is for the philosopher what the other world is for the devout!"

APPENDIX. RAMEAU'S NEPHEW: A TRANSLATION.



[SEE VOL. I. p. 348.]

[I have omitted such pages in the following translation as refer simply to personages who have lost all possibility of interest for our generation; nor did any object seem to be served by reproducing the technical points of the musical discussion. Enough is given, and given as faithfully as I know how, to show the reader what *Rameau's Nephew* is.]

In all weathers, wet or fine, it is my practice to go, towards five o'clock in the evening, to take a turn in the Palais Royal. I am he whom you may see any afternoon sitting by himself and musing in D'Argenson's seat. I keep up talk with myself about politics, love, taste, or philosophy; I leave my mind to play the libertine unchecked; and it is welcome to run after the first idea that offers, sage or gay, just as you see our young beaux in the Foy passage following the steps of some gay nymph, with her saucy mien, face all smiles, eyes all fire, and nose a trifle turned up; then quitting her for another, attacking them all, but attaching themselves to none. My thoughts, — these are the wantons for me. If the weather be too cold or too wet, I take shelter in the Regency coffee-house. There I amuse myself by looking on while they play chess. Nowhere in the world do they play chess so skilfully as in Paris, and nowhere in Paris as they do at this coffee-house; 'tis here you see Légal the profound, Philidor the subtle, Mayot the solid; here you see the most astounding moves, and listen to the sorriest talk, for if a man may be at once a wit and a great chess-player, like Légal, you may also be a great chess-player and a sad simpleton, like Joubert and Mayot.

One day I was there after dinner, watching intently, saying little, and hearing the very least possible, when there approached me one of the most eccentric figures in the country, where God has not made them lacking. He

is a mixture of elevation and lowness, of good sense and madness; the notions of good and bad must be mixed up together in strange confusion in his head, for he shows the good qualities that nature has bestowed on him without any ostentation, and the bad ones without the smallest shame. For the rest, he is endowed with a vigorous frame, a particular warmth of imagination, and an astonishing strength of lungs. If you ever meet him, and if you are not arrested by his originality, you will either stuff your fingers into your ears, or else take to your heels. Heavens, what a monstrous pipe! Nothing is so little like him as himself. One time he is lean and wan, like a patient in the last stage of consumption; you could count his teeth through his cheeks; you would say he must have passed several days without tasting a morsel, or that he is fresh from La Trappe. A month after, he is stout and sleek, as if he had been sitting all the time at the board of a financier, or had been shut up in a Bernardine monastery. To-day in dirty linen, his clothes torn or patched, with barely a shoe to his foot, he steals along with a bent head; you are tempted to hail him and fling him a shilling. To-morrow all powdered, curled, in a fine coat, he marches past with head erect and open mien, and you would almost take him for a decent worthy creature. He lives from day to day, from hand to mouth, downcast or sad, just as things may go. His first care in a morning, when he gets up, is to know where he will dine; and after dinner, he begins to think where he may pick up a supper. Night brings disquiets of its own. Either he climbs to a shabby garret that he has, unless the landlady, weary of waiting for her rent, has taken the key away from him; or else he slinks to some tavern on the outskirts of the town, where he waits for daybreak over a piece of bread and a mug of beer. When he has not threepence in his pocket, as sometimes happens, he has recourse either to a hackney carriage belonging to a friend, or to the coachman of some man of quality, who gives him a bed on the straw beside the horses. In the morning, he still has bits of his mattress in his hair. If the

weather is mild, he measures the Champs Elysées all night long. With the day he reappears in the town, dressed over night for the morrow, and from the morrow sometimes dressed for the rest of the week.

I do not rate these originals very highly. Other people make familiar acquaintances, and even friends, of them. They detain me perhaps once in a twelvemonth, if I happen to fall in with them. Their character stands out from the rest of the world, and breaks that wearisome uniformity which our bringing-up, our social conventions, and our arbitrary fashions have introduced. If one of them makes his appearance in a company, he is a piece of leaven which ferments and restores to each a portion of his natural individuality. He stirs people up, moves them, invites to praise or blame; he is the means of bringing out the truth, he gives honest people a chance of showing themselves, he unmasks the rogues; this is the time when a man of sense listens, and distinguishes his company.

I had known my present man long ago. He used to frequent a house to which his clever parts had opened the door. There was an only daughter. He swore to the father and mother that he would marry their daughter. They shrugged their shoulders, laughed in his face, told him he was out of his senses, and I saw in an instant that his business was done. He wanted to borrow a few crowns from me, which I gave him. He worked his way, I cannot tell how, into some houses where he had his plate laid for him, but on condition that he should never open his lips without leave. He held his tongue and ate away in a towering rage: it was excellent to watch him in this state of constraint. If he could not resist breaking the treaty, and ever began to open his mouth, at the first word all the guests called out *Rameau!* Then fury sparkled in his eyes, and he turned to his plate in a worse passion than ever. You were curious to know the man’s name, and now you know it: ’tis Rameau, pupil of the famous man who delivered us from the plain-song that we had been used to chant for over a hundred years; who wrote so

many unintelligible visions and apocalyptic truths on the theory of music, of which neither he nor anybody else understood a word; and from whom we have a certain number of operas that are not without harmony, refrains, random notions, uproar, triumphs, glories, murmurs, breathless victories, and dance-tunes that will last to all eternity; and who, after burying Lulli, the Florentine, will be himself buried by the Italian virtuosi, — a fate that he had a presentiment of, which made him gloomy and chagrined; for nobody is in such ill-humour, not even a pretty woman who awakes with a pimple on her nose, as an author threatened with loss of his reputation.

He comes up to me. Ah, ah! here you are, my philosopher! And what are you doing among this pack of idlers? Can it be possible that you too waste your time in pushing the wood?...

I. — No, but when I have nothing better to do, I amuse myself by watching people who push it well.

He. — In that case you are amusing yourself with a vengeance. Except Philidor and Légal, there is not one of them who knows anything about it.

I. — What of M. de Bussy?

He. — He is as a chess-player what Mademoiselle Clairon is as an actress; they know of their playing, one and the other, as much as anybody can learn.

I. — You are hard to please, and I see you can forgive nothing short of the sublimities.

He. — True, in chess, women, poetry, eloquence, music, and all such fiddle-faddle. What is the use of mediocrity in these matters?

I. — Little enough, I agree. But the thing is that there must be a great number of men at work, for us to make sure of the man of genius: he is one out of a multitude. But let that pass. 'Tis an age since I have seen you. Though I do not often think about you when you are out of sight, yet it is always a pleasure to me to meet you. What have you been about?

He. — What you, I, and everybody else are about — some good, some bad, and nothing at all. Then, I have been hungry, and I have eaten when opportunity offered; after eating, I have been thirsty, and now and then have had something to drink. Besides that, my beard grew, and as it grew I had it shaved.

I. — There you were wrong; it is the only thing wanting to make a sage of you.

He. — Ay, ay; I have a wide and furrowed brow, a glowing eye, a firm nose, broad cheeks, a black and bushy eyebrow, a clean cut mouth, a square jaw. Cover this enormous chin with amplitude of beard, and I warrant you it would look vastly well in marble or in bronze.

I. — By the side of a Cæsar, a Marcus Aurelius, a Socrates.

He. — Nay, I should be better between Diogenes, Laïs, and Phryne. I am brazenfaced as the one, and I am happy to pay a visit to the others.

I. — Are you always well?

He. — Yes, commonly; but I am no great wonders to-day.

I. — Why, you have a paunch like Silenus, and a face like....

He. — A face you might take for I don’t know what. The ill humour that dries up my dear master seems to fatten his dear pupil.

I. — And this dear master, do you ever see him now?

He. — Yes, passing along the street.

I. — Does he do nothing for you?

He. — If he has done anything for anybody, it is without knowing it. He is a philosopher after his fashion. He thinks of nobody but himself. His wife and his daughter may die as soon as they please; provided the church bells that toll for them continue to sound the *twelfth* and the *seventeenth*, all will be well. It is lucky for him, and that is what I especially prize in your men of genius. They are only good for one thing; outside of that, nothing. They do not know what it is to be citizens, fathers, mothers, kinsfolk, friends.

Between ourselves, it is no bad thing to be like them at every point, but we should not wish the grain to become common. We must have men; but men of genius, no; no, on my word; of them we need none. 'Tis they who change the face of the globe; and in the smallest things folly is so common and so almighty, that you cannot mend it without an infinite disturbance. Part of what they have dreamt comes to pass, and part remains as it was; hence two gospels, the dress of a harlequin. The wisdom of Rabelais's moral is the true wisdom both for his own repose and that of other people: to do one's duty so so, always to speak well of the prior, and to let the world go as it lists. It must go well, for most people are content with it. If I knew history enough, I should prove to you that evil has always come about here below through a few men of genius, but I do not know history, no more than I know anything else. The deuce take me, if I have learnt anything, or if I find myself a pin the worse for not having learnt anything. I was one day at the table of the minister of the King of —— , who has brains enough for four, and he showed as plain as one and one make two, that nothing was more useful to people than falsehood, nothing more mischievous than truth. I don't remember his proofs very clearly, but it evidently followed from them that men of genius are detestable, and that if a child at its birth bore on its brow the mark of that dangerous gift of nature, it ought to be smothered or else thrown to the ducks.

I. — Yet such people, foes as they are to genius, all lay claim to it.

He. — I daresay they think so in their own minds, but I doubt if they would venture to admit it.

I. — Ah, that is their modesty. So you conceived from that a frightful antipathy to genius.

He. — One that I shall never get over.

I. — Yet I have seen the time when you were in despair at the thought of being only a common man. You will never be happy if the pro and the con

distress you alike. You should take your side, and keep to it. Though people will agree with you that men of genius are usually singular, or as the proverb says, *there are no great wits without a grain of madness*, yet they will always look down on ages that have produced no men of genius. They will pay honour to the nations among whom they have existed; sooner or later, they rear statues to them, and regard them as the benefactors of the human race. With all deference to the sublime minister whom you have cited, I still believe that if falsehood may sometimes be useful for a moment, it is surely hurtful in the long-run; and so, on the other hand, truth is surely useful in the long-run, though it may sometimes chance to be inconvenient for the moment. Whence I should be tempted to conclude that the man of genius who cries down a general error, or wins credit for a great truth, is always a creature that deserves our veneration. It may happen that such an one falls a victim to prejudice and the laws; but there are two sorts of laws, the one of an equity and generality that is absolute, the other of an incongruous kind, which owe all their sanction to the blindness or exigency of circumstance. The latter only cover the culprit who infringes them with passing ignominy, an ignominy that time pours back on the judges and the nations, there to remain for ever. Whether is Socrates, or the authority that bade him drink the hemlock, in the worst dishonour in our day?

He. — Not so fast. Was he any the less for that condemned? Or any the less put to death? Or any the less a bad citizen? By his contempt for a bad law did he any the less encourage blockheads to despise good ones? Or was he any the less an audacious eccentric? You were close there upon an admission that would have done little for men of genius.

I. — But listen to me, my good man. A society ought not to have bad laws, and if it had only good ones, it would never find itself persecuting a man of genius. I never said to you that genius was inseparably bound up with wickedness, any more than wickedness is with genius. A fool is many

a time far worse than a man of parts. Even supposing a man of genius to be usually of a harsh carriage, awkward, prickly, unbearable; even if he be thoroughly bad, what conclusion do you draw?

He. — That he ought to be drowned.

I. — Gently, good man. Now I will not take your uncle Rameau for an instance; he is harsh, he is brutal, he has no humanity, he is a miser, he is a bad father, bad husband, bad uncle; but it has never been settled that he is particularly clever, that he has advanced his art, or that there will be any talk of his works ten years hence. But Racine, now? He at any rate had genius, and did not pass for too good a man. And Voltaire?

He. — Beware of pressing me, for I am not one to shrink from conclusions.

I. — Which of the two would you prefer; that he should have been a worthy soul, identified with his till, like Briasson, or with his yard measure, like Barbier, each year producing a lawful babe, good husband, good father, good uncle, good neighbour, decent trader, but nothing more; or that he should have been treacherous, ambitious, envious, spiteful, but the author of *Andromaque*, *Britannicus*, *Iphigenie*, *Phèdre*, *Athalie*?

He. — For his own sake, on my word, perhaps of the two men it would have been a great deal better that he should have been the first.

I. — That is even infinitely more true than you think.

He. — Ah, there you are, you others! If we say anything good and to the purpose, ’tis like madmen or creatures inspired, by a hazard; it is only you wise people who know what you mean. Yes, my philosopher, I know what I mean as well as you do.

I. — Let us see. Now why did you say that of him?

He. — Because all the fine things he did never brought him twenty thousand francs, and if he had been a silk merchant in the Rue Saint Denis or Saint Honoré, a good wholesale grocer, an apothecary with plenty of

customers, he would have amassed an immense fortune, and in amassing it, he could have enjoyed every pleasure in life; he would have thrown a pistole from time to time to a poor devil of a droll like me; we should have had good dinners at his house, played high play, drunk first-rate wines, first-rate liqueurs, first-rate coffee, had glorious excursions into the country. Now you see I know what I meant. You laugh? But let me go on. It would have been better for everybody about him.

I. — No doubt it would, provided that he had not put to unworthy use what gain he had made in lawful commerce, and had banished from his house all those gamesters, all those parasites, all those idle flatterers, all those depraved ne'er-do-wells, and had bidden his shop-boys give a sound beating to the officious creature who offers to play pander.

He. — A beating, sir, a beating! No one is beaten in any well-governed town. It is a decent enough trade; plenty of people with fine titles meddle with it. And what the deuce would you have him do with his money, if he is not to have a good table, good company, good wines, handsome women, pleasures of every colour, diversion of every sort? I would as lief be a beggar as possess a mighty fortune without any of these enjoyments. But go back to Racine. He was only good for people who did not know him, and for a time when he had ceased to exist.

I. — Granted, but weigh the good and bad. A thousand years from now he will draw tears, he will be the admiration of men in all the countries of the earth; he will inspire compassion, tenderness, pity. They will ask who he was, and to what land he belonged, and France will be envied. He brought suffering on one or two people who are dead, and in whom we take hardly any interest; we have nothing to fear from his vices or his foibles. It would have been better, no doubt, that he should have received from nature the virtues of a good man, instead of the talents of a great one. He is a tree which made a few other trees planted near him wither up, and which

smothered the plants that grew at his feet; but he reared his height to the clouds, and his branches spread far; he lends his shadow to all who came, or come now, or ever shall come, to repose by his majestic trunk; he brought forth fruits of exquisite savour which are renewed again and again without ceasing.

We might wish that Voltaire had the mildness of Duclos, the ingenuousness of the Abbé Trublet, the rectitude of the Abbé d'Olivet. But as that cannot be, let us look at the thing on the side of it that is really interesting; let us forget for an instant the point we occupy in space and time, and let us extend our vision over centuries to come, and peoples yet unborn, and distant lands yet unvisited. Let us think of the good of our race: if we are not generous enough, at least let us forgive nature for being wiser than ourselves. If you throw cold water on Greuze's head, very likely you will extinguish his talent along with his vanity. If you make Voltaire less sensitive to criticism, he will lose the art that took him to the inmost depths of the soul of Merope, and will never stir a single emotion in you more.

He. — But if nature be as powerful as she is wise, why did she not make them as good as she made them great?

I. — Do you not see how such reasoning as that overturns the general order, and that if all were excellent here below, then there would be nothing excellent.

He. — You are right. The important point is that you and I should be here; provided only that you and I are you and I, then let all besides go as it can. The best order of things, in my notion, is that in which I was to have a place, and a plague on the most perfect of worlds, if I don't belong to it! I would rather exist, and even be a bad hand at reasoning, than not exist at all.

I. — There is nobody but thinks as you do, and whoever brings his indictment against the order of things, forgets that he is renouncing his own existence.

He. — That is true.

I. — So let us accept things as they are; let us see how much they cost us and how much they give us, and leave the whole as it is, for we do not know it well enough either to praise or blame it; and perhaps after all it is neither good nor ill, if it is necessary, as so many good folk suppose.

He. — Now you are going beyond me. What you say seems like philosophy, and I warn you that I never meddle with that. All that I know is that I should be very well pleased to be somebody else, on the chance of being a genius and a great man; yes, I must agree. I have something here that tells me so. I never in my life heard a man praised, that his eulogy did not fill me with secret fury. I am full of envy. If I hear something about their private life that is a discredit to them, I listen with pleasure: it brings us nearer to a level; I bear my mediocrity more comfortably. I say to myself: Ah, thou couldst never have done *Mahomet*, nor the eulogy on Maupeou. So I have always been, and I always shall be, mortified at my own mediocrity. Yes, I tell you I am mediocre, and it provokes me. I never heard the overture to the *Indes galantes* performed, nor the *Profonds abîmes de Ténare, Nuit, eternelle nuit*, sung without saying to myself: That is what thou wilt never do. So I was jealous of my uncle.

I. — If that is the only thing that chagrins you, it is hardly worth the trouble.

He.— 'Tis nothing, only a passing humour. [Then he set himself to hum the overture and the air he had spoken of, and went on:]

The something which is here and speaks to me says: Rameau, thou wouldst fain have written those two pieces: if thou hadst done those two pieces, thou wouldst soon do two others; and after thou hadst done a certain number, they would play thee and sing thee everywhere. In walking, thou wouldst hold thy head erect, thy conscience would testify within thy bosom to thy own merit; the others would point thee out, There goes the man who

wrote the pretty gavottes [and he hummed the gavottes. Then with the air of a man bathed in delight and his eyes shining with it, he went on, rubbing his hands:] Thou shalt have a fine house [he marked out its size with his arms], a famous bed [he stretched himself luxuriously upon it], capital wines [he sipped them in imagination, smacking his lips], a handsome equipage [he raised his foot as if to mount], a hundred varlets who will come to offer thee fresh incense every day [and he fancied he saw them all around him, Palissot, Poinsinet, the two Frérons, Laporte, he heard them, approved of them, smiled at them, contemptuously repulsed them, drove them away, called them back; then he continued:] And it is thus they would tell thee on getting up in a morning that thou art a great man; thou wouldst read in the *Histoire des Trois Siècles* that thou art a great man, thou wouldst be convinced of an evening that thou art a great man, and the great man Rameau would fall asleep to the soft murmur of the eulogy that would ring in his ears; even as he slept he would have a complacent air; his chest would expand, and rise, and fall with comfort; he would move like a great man ... [and as he talked he let himself sink softly on a bench, he closed his eyes, and imitated the blissful sleep that his mind was picturing. After relishing the sweetness of this repose for a few instants he awoke, stretched his arms, yawned, rubbed his eyes, and looked about him for his pack of vapid flatterers].

I. — You think, then, the happy mortal has his sleep?

He. — Think so! A sorry wretch like me! At night when I get back to my garret, and burrow in my truckle-bed, I shrink up under my blanket, my chest is all compressed, and I can hardly breathe; it seems like a moan that you can barely hear. Now a banker makes the room ring and astonishes a whole street. But what afflicts me to-day, is not that I snore and sleep meanly and shabbily, like a paltry outcast.

I. — Yet that is a sorry thing enough.

He. — What has befallen me is still more so.

I. — What is that?

He. — You have always taken some interest in me, because I am a *bon diable*, whom you rather despise at bottom, but who diverts you.

I. — Well, that is the plain truth.

He. — I will tell you. [Before beginning he heaved a profound sigh, and clasped his brow with his two hands. Then he recovers his tranquillity and says:]

You know that I am an ignoramus, a fool, a madman, an impertinent, a sluggard, a glutton....

I. — What a panegyric!

He.— 'Tis true to the letter, there is not a word to take away; prithee, no debate on that. No one knows me better. I know myself and I do not tell the whole.

I. — I have no wish to cross you, and I will agree to anything.

He. — Well, I used to live with people, who took a liking for me, plainly because I was gifted with all these qualities to such a rare degree.

I. — That is curious. Until now I always thought that people hid these things even from themselves, or else that they granted themselves pardon, while they despised them in others.

He. — Hide them from themselves! Can men do that? You may be sure that when Palissot is all alone and returns upon himself, he tells a very different tale; you may be sure that when he talks quietly with his colleague, they candidly admit that they are only a pair of mighty rogues. Despise such things in others! My people were far more equitable, and they took my character for a perfect nonesuch; I was in clover; they feasted me, they did not lose me from their sight for a single instant without sighing for my return. I was their excellent Rameau, their dear Rameau, their Rameau the mad, the impertinent, the lazy, the greedy, the merry-man, the lout. There

was not one of these epithets which did not bring me a smile, a caress, a tap on the shoulder, a cuff, a kick; at table, a titbit tossed on to my plate; away from the table, a freedom that I took without consequences, for, do you see, I am a man without consequence. They do with me and before me and at me whatever they like, without my standing on any ceremony. And the little presents that showered on me! The great hound that I am, I have lost all! I have lost all for having had common sense once, one single time in my life. Ah! if that ever chances again!

I. — What was the matter, then?

He. — Rameau, Rameau, did they ever take you for that? The folly of having had a little taste, a trifle of wit, a spice of reason; Rameau, my friend, that will teach you the difference between what God made you, and what your protectors wanted you to be. So they took you by the shoulder, they led you to the door, and cried: "Be off, rascal; never appear more. He would fain have sense, reason, wit, I declare! Off with you; we have all these qualities and to spare!" You went away biting your thumb; it was your infernal tongue, that you ought to have bitten before all this. For not bethinking you of that, here you are in the gutter without a farthing, or a place to lay your head. You were well housed, and now you will be lucky if you get your garret again; you had a good bed, and now a truss of straw awaits you between M. de Soubise's coachman and friend Robbé. Instead of the gentle quiet slumber that you had, you will have the neighing and stamping of horses all night long — you wretch, idiot, possessed by a million devils!

I. — But is there no way of setting things straight? Is the fault you committed so unpardonable? If I were you, I should go find my people again. You are more indispensable to them than you suppose.

He. — Oh, as for that, I know that now they have me no longer to make fun for them, they are dull as ditch-water.

I. — Then I should go back: I would not give them time enough to learn how to get on without me, or to turn to some more decent amusement. For who knows what may happen?

He. — That is not what I am afraid of: that will never come to pass.

I. — But sublime as you may be, some one else may replace you.

He. — Hardly.

I. — Hardly, it is true. Still I would go with that lacklustre face, those haggard eyes, that open breast, that tumbled hair, in that downright tragic state in which you are now. I would throw myself at the feet of the divinity, and without rising I would say with a low and sobbing voice: "Forgive me, madam! Forgive me! I am the vilest of creatures. It was only one unfortunate moment, for you know I am not subject to common sense, and I promise you, I will never have it again so long as I live."

[The diverting part of it was that, while I discoursed to him in this way, he executed it pantomimically, and threw himself on the ground; with his eyes fixed on the earth, he seemed to hold between his two hands the tip of a slipper, he wept, he sobbed, he cried: "Yes, my queen, yes, I promise, I never will, so long as I live, so long as ever I live...." Then recovering himself abruptly, he went on in a serious and deliberate tone:]

He. — Yes, you are right; I see it is the best. Yet to go and humiliate one's self before a hussy, cry for mercy at the feet of a little actress with the hisses of the pit for ever in her ears! I, Rameau, son of Rameau, the apothecary of Dijon, who is a good man and never yet bent his knee to a creature in the world! I, Rameau, who have composed pieces for the piano that nobody plays, but which will perhaps be the only pieces ever to reach posterity, and posterity will play them — I, I, must go! Stay, sir, it cannot be [and striking his right hand on his breast, he went on:] I feel here something that rises and tells me: Never, Rameau, never. There must be a certain dignity attached to human nature that nothing can stifle; it awakes *à propos*

des bottes; you cannot explain it; for there are other days when it would cost me not a pang to be as vile as you like, and for a halfpenny there is nothing too dirty for me to do.

I. — Then if the expedient I have suggested to you is not to your taste, have courage enough to remain a beggar.

He.— 'Tis hard being a beggar, while there are so many rich fools at whose expense one can live. And the contempt for one's self, it is insupportable.

I. — Do you know that sentiment?

He. — Know it! How many times have I said to myself: What, Rameau, there are ten thousand good tables in Paris, with fifteen or twenty covers apiece, and of these covers not one for thee! There are purses full of gold which is poured out right and left, and not a crown of it falls to thee! A thousand witlings without parts and without worth, a thousand paltry creatures without a charm, a thousand scurvy intriguers, are all well clad, while thou must go bare! Canst thou be such a nincompoop as all this? Couldst thou not flatter as well as anybody else? Couldst thou not find out how to lie, swear, forswear, promise, keep or break, like anybody else? Couldst thou not favour the intrigue of my lady, and carry the love-letter of my lord, like anybody else? Couldst thou not find out the trick of making some shopkeeper's daughter understand how shabbily dressed she is, how two fine earrings, a touch of rouge, some lace, and a Polish gown would make her ravishing; that those little feet were not made for trudging through the mud; that there is a handsome gentleman, young, rich, in a coat covered with lace, with a superb carriage and six fine lackeys, who once saw her as he passed, who thought her charming and wonderful, and that ever since that day he has taken neither bite nor sup, cannot sleep at nights, and will surely die of it?... He comes, he pleases, the little maid vanishes, and I pocket my two thousand crowns. What, thou hast a talent like this, and yet

in want of bread? Shame on thee, wretch! I recalled a crowd of scoundrels who were not a patch upon me, and yet were rolling in money. There was I in serge, and they in velvet; they leaned on gold-headed canes, and had fine rings on their fingers. And what were they? Wretched bungling strummers, and now they are a kind of fine gentlemen. At such times I felt full of courage, my soul inflamed and elevated, my wits alert and subtle, and capable of anything in the world. But this happy turn did not last, it would seem, for so far I have not been able to make much way. However that may be, there is the text of my frequent soliloquies, which you may paraphrase as you choose, provided you are sure that I know what self-contempt is, and that torture of conscience which comes of the usefulness of the gifts that heaven has bestowed on us; that is the cruellest stroke of all. A man might almost as well never have been born.

[I had listened to him all the time, and as he enacted the scene with the poor girl, with my heart moved by two conflicting emotions, I did not know whether to give myself up to the longing I had to laugh, or to a transport of indignation. I was distressingly perplexed between two humours; twenty times an uncontrollable burst of laughter kept my anger back, and twenty times the anger that was rising from the bottom of my soul suddenly ended in a burst of laughter. I was confounded by so much shrewdness and so much vileness, by ideas now so just and then so false, by such general perversity of sentiments, such complete turpitude, and such marvellously uncommon frankness. He perceived the struggle going on within me:] What ails you? said he.

I. — Nothing.

He. — You seem to be disturbed.

I. — And I am.

He. — But now, after all, what do you advise me to do?

I. — To change your way of talking. You unfortunate soul, to what abject state have you fallen!

He. — I admit it. And yet, do not let my state touch you too deeply; I had no intention, in opening my mind to you, to give you pain. I managed to scrape up a few savings when I was with the people. Remember that I wanted nothing, not a thing, and they made me a certain allowance for pocket-money.

[He again began to tap his brow with one of his fists, to bite his lips, and to roll his eyes towards the ceiling, going on to say:]

But ’tis all over; I have put something aside; time has passed, and that is always so much gained.

I. — So much lost, you mean.

He. — No, no; gained. People grow rich every moment; a day less to live, or a crown to the good, ’tis all one. When the last moment comes, one is as rich as another; Samuel Bernard, who by pillaging and stealing and playing bankrupt, leaves seven and twenty million francs in gold, is just like Rameau, who leaves not a penny, and will be indebted to charity for a shroud to wrap round him. The dead man hears not the tolling of the bell; ’tis in vain that a hundred priests bawl dirges for him, and that a long file of blazing torches go before: his soul walks not by the side of the master of the ceremonies. To moulder under marble, or to moulder under clay, ’tis still to moulder. To have around one’s bier children in red and children in blue, or to have not a creature, what matters it? And then, look at this wrist, it was stiff as the devil; the ten fingers, they were so many sticks fastened into a metacarpus made of wood; and these muscles were like old strings of catgut, drier, stiffer, harder to bend than if that they had been used for a turner’s wheel; but I have so twisted and broken and bent them. What, thou wilt not go? And I say that thou shalt....

[And at this, with his right hand he seized the fingers and wrist of his left hand, and turned them first up and then down. The extremity of the fingers touched the arm, till the joints cracked again. I was afraid every instant that the bones would remain dislocated.]

I. — Take care, you will do yourself a mischief.

He. — Don't be afraid, they are used to it. For ten years I have given it them in a very different style. They had to accustom themselves to it, however they liked it, and to learn to find their place on the keys and to leap over the strings. So now they go where they must.

[At the same moment he threw himself into the attitude of a violin-player; he hummed an allegro of Locatelli's; his right arm imitated the movement of the bow; his left hand and his fingers seemed to be feeling along the handle. If he makes a false note, he stops, tightens or slackens his string, and strikes it with his nail, to make sure of its being in tune, and then takes up the piece where he left off. He beats time with his foot, moves his head, his feet, his hands, his arms, his body, as you may have seen Ferrari or Chiabran, or some other virtuoso in the same convulsions, presenting the image of the same torture, and giving me nearly as much pain; for is it not a painful thing to watch the torture of a man who is busy painting pleasure for my benefit? Draw a curtain to hide the man from me, if he must show me the spectacle of a victim on the rack. In the midst of all these agitations and cries, if there occurred one of those harmonious passages where the bow moves slowly over several of the strings at once, his face put on an air of ecstasy, his voice softened, he listened to himself with perfect ravishment; it is undoubted that the chorus sounded both in his ears and mine. Then replacing his imaginary instrument under his left arm with the same hand by which he held it, and letting his right hand drop with the bow in it, said:]

Well, what do you think of it?

I. — Wonderful!

He. — Not bad, I fancy; it sounds pretty much like the others.... [And then he stooped down, like a musician placing himself at the piano.]

I. — Nay, I beg you to be merciful both to me and to yourself.

He. — No, no; now that I have got you, you shall hear me. I will have no vote that is given without your knowing why. You will say a good word for me with more confidence, and that will be worth a new pupil to me.

I. — But I am so little in the world, and you will tire yourself all to no purpose.

He. — I am never tired.

[As I saw that it was useless to have pity on my man, for the sonata on the violin had bathed him in perspiration, I resolved to let him do as he would. So behold him seated at the piano, his legs bent, his head thrown back towards the ceiling, where you would have thought he saw a score written up, humming, preluding, dashing off a piece of Alberti's or Galuppi's, I forget which. His voice went like the wind, and his fingers leapt over the imaginary keys. The various passions succeeded one another on his face; you observed on it tenderness, anger, pleasure, sorrow; you felt the piano notes, the forte notes, and I am sure that a more skilful musician than myself would have recognised the piece by the movement and the character, by his gestures, and by a few notes of airs which escaped from him now and again. But the absurd thing was to see him from time to time hesitate and take himself up as if he had gone wrong.]

Now, you perceive, said he, rising and wiping away the drops of sweat which rolled down his cheeks, that we know how to place our third, our superfluous fifth, and that we know all about our dominants. Those enharmonic passages, about which the dear uncle makes such fuss, they are not like having the sea to swallow; we can manage them well enough.

I. — You have given yourself a great deal of trouble to show me that you are uncommonly clever; but I would have taken your word for it.

He. — Uncommonly clever; oh no! For my trade, I know it decently, and that is more than one wants; for in this country is one obliged to know all that one shows?

I. — No more than to know all that one teaches.

He. — That is true, most thoroughly true. Now, sir philosopher, your hand on your conscience, speak the truth; there was a time when you were not a man of such substance as you are to-day.

I. — I am not so very substantial even now.

He. — But you would not go now to the Luxembourg in summer-time.... You remember?

I. — No more of that. Yes, I do remember.

He. — In an overcoat of gray shag?

I. — Ay, ay.

He. — Terribly worn at one side, with one of the sleeves torn; and black woollen stockings mended at the back with white thread.

I. — Yes, anything you like.

He. — What were you doing in the alley of Sighs?

I. — Cutting a shabby figure enough, I daresay.

He. — You used to give lessons in mathematics?

I. — Without knowing a word about them. Is not that what you want to come to?

He. — Exactly so.

I. — I learnt by teaching others, and I turned out some good pupils.

He — That may be; but music is not like algebra or geometry. Now that you are a substantial personage....

I. — Not so substantial, I tell you.

He. — And have a good lining to your purse....

I. — Not so good.

He. — Let your daughter have masters.

I. — Not yet; it is her mother who looks to her education, for one must have peace in one's house.

He. — Peace in one's house? You have only that, when you are either master or servant, and it should be master. I had a wife — may heaven bless her soul — but when it happened sometimes that she played malapert, I used to mount the high horse, and bring out my thunder. I used to say like the Creator: Let there be light, and there was light. So for four years we had not ten times in all one word higher than another. How old is your child?

I. — That has nothing to do with the matter.

He. — How old is your child, I say?

I. — The devil take you, leave my child and her age alone, and return to the master she is to have.

He. — I know nothing so pig-headed as a philosopher. In all humility and supplication, might one not know from his highness the philosopher, about what age her ladyship, his daughter, may be?

I. — I suppose she is eight.

He. — Eight! Then four years ago she ought to have had her fingers on the keys.

I. — But perhaps I have no fancy for including in the scheme of her education a study that takes so much time and is good for so little.

He. — And what will you teach her, if you please?

I. — To reason justly, if I can; a thing so uncommon among men, and more uncommon still among women.

He. — Oh, let her reason as ill as she chooses, if she is only pretty, amusing, and coquettish.

I. — As nature has been unkind enough to give her a delicate organisation with a very sensitive soul, and to expose her to the same troubles in life as if she had a strong organisation and a heart of bronze, I will teach her, if I can, to bear them courageously.

He. — Let her weep and give herself airs, and have nerves all on edge like the rest, if only she is pretty, amusing, and coquettish. What, is she to learn no dancing nor deportment?

I. — Yes, just enough to make a curtsey, to have a good carriage, to enter a room gracefully, and to know how to walk.

He. — No singing?

I. — Just enough to pronounce her words well.

He. — No music?

I. — If there were a good teacher of harmony, I would gladly entrust her to him two hours a day for two or three years, not any more.

He. — And instead of the essential things that you are going to suppress?...

I. — I place grammar, fables, history, geography, a little drawing, and a great deal of morality.

He. — How easy it would be for me to prove to you the uselessness of all such knowledge in a world like ours? Uselessness, do I say? Perhaps even the danger! But I will for the moment ask you a single question, will she not require one or two masters?

I. — No doubt.

He. — And you hope that these masters will know the grammar, the fables, the history, the geography, the morality, in which they will give her lessons? Moonshine, my dear mentor, sheer moonshine! If they knew these things well enough to teach them to other people, they never would teach them?

I. — And why?

He. — Because they would have spent all their lives in studying them. It is necessary to be profound in art and science, to know its elements thoroughly. Classical books can only be well done by those who have grown gray in harness; it is the middle and the end which light up the

darkness of the beginning. Ask your friend D'Alembert, the coryphæus of mathematics, if he thinks himself too good to write about the elements. It was not till after thirty or forty years of practice that my uncle got a glimpse of the profundities and the first rays of light in musical theory.

I. — O madman, arch-madman, I cried, how comes it that in thine evil head such just ideas go pell-mell with such a mass of extravagances?

He. — Who on earth can find that out? 'Tis chance that flings them to you, and they remain. If you do not know the whole of a thing, you know none of it well; you do not know whither one thing leads, nor whence another has come, where this and that should be placed, which ought to pass the first, and where the second would be best. Can you teach well without method? And method, whence comes that? I vow to you, my dear philosopher, I have a notion that physics will always be a poor science, a drop of water raised by a needle-point from the vast ocean, a grain loosened from an Alpine chain. And then, seeking the reasons of phenomena! In truth, one might every whit as well be ignorant, as know so little and know it so ill; and that was exactly my doctrine when I gave myself out for a music-master. What are you musing over?

I. — I am thinking that all you have told me is more specious than solid. But that is no matter. You taught, you say, accompaniment and composition.

He. — Yes.

I. — And you knew nothing about either.

He. — No, i' faith; and that is why there were worse than I was, namely those who fancied they knew something. At any rate, I did not spoil either the child's taste or its hands. When they passed from me to a good master, if they had learnt nothing, at all events they had nothing to unlearn, and that was always so much time and so much money saved.

I. — What did you do?

He. — What they all do! I got there, I threw myself into a chair. “What shocking weather! How tiring the streets are!” Then some gossip: “Mademoiselle Lemierre was to have taken the part of Vestal in the new opera, but she is in an interesting condition for the second time, and they do not know who will take her place. Mademoiselle Arnould has just left her little Count: they say she is negotiating with Bertin.... That poor Dumesnil no longer knows either what he is saying or what he is doing.... Now, Miss, take your book.” While Miss, who is in no hurry, is looking for her book, which is lost, while they call the housemaid and scold and make a great stir, I continue— “The Clairon is really incomprehensible. They talk of a marriage which is outrageously absurd: ’tis that of Miss ... what is her name? a little creature that used to live with so and so, etcetera, etcetera: — Come, Rameau, you are talking nonsense; it is impossible. — I don’t talk nonsense at all; they even say it is done. There is a rumour that Voltaire is dead, and so much the better. — And pray, why so much the better? — Because he must be going to give us something more laughable than usual; it is always his custom to die a fortnight before.” What more shall I tell you? I used to tell certain naughtinesses that I brought from houses where I had been, for we are all of us great fetchers and carriers. I played the madman, they listened to me, they laughed, they called out: How charming he is! Meanwhile Missy’s book had been found under the sofa, where it had been pulled about, gnawed, torn by a puppy or a kitten. She sat down to the piano. At first she made a noise on it by herself; then I went towards her, after giving her mother a sign of approbation. The mother: “That is not bad; people have only to be in earnest, but they are not in earnest; they would rather waste their time in chattering, in disarranging things, in gadding hither and thither, and I know not what besides. Your back is no sooner turned, M. Rameau, than the book is shut up, not to be opened until your next visit; still you never scold her.” Then, as something had to be done, I

took hold of her hands and placed them differently; I got out of temper, I called out "*Sol, Sol, Sol*, Miss, it is a *Sol*." The mother: "Have you no ear? I am not at the piano, and I can't see your book, yet I know it ought to be a *Sol*. You are most troublesome to your teacher; I can't tell how he is so patient; you do not remember a word of what he says to you; you make no progress...." Then I would lower my tone rather, and throwing my head on one side, would say: "Pardon me, madam, all would go very well if the young lady liked, if she only studied a little more; but it is not bad." The mother: "If I were you, I should keep her at one piece for a whole year." "Oh, as for that, she shall not leave it before she has mastered every difficulty, and that will not be as long as you may think." "Monsieur Rameau, you flatter her, you are too good. That is the only part of the lesson which she will keep in mind, and she will take care to repeat it to me upon occasion...." And so the time got over; my pupil presented me my little fee, with the curtsey she had learnt from the dancing master. I put it into my pocket while the mother said: "Very well done, mademoiselle; if Favillier were here, he would applaud you." I chattered a moment or two for politeness' sake, and behold, that was what they call a music lesson.

I. — Well, and now it is quite another thing?

He. — Another thing! I should think so, indeed. I get there. I am deadly grave; I take off my cuffs hastily, I open the piano, I run my fingers over the keys, I am always in a desperate hurry. If they keep me waiting a moment, I cry out as if they were robbing me of a crown piece: in an hour from now I must be so and so; in two hours, with the duchess of so and so; I am expected to dine with a handsome marchioness, and then, on leaving her, there is a concert at the baron's....

I. — And all the time nobody is expecting you anywhere at all?

He. — No.

I. — What vile arts!

He. — Vile, forsooth! Why vile? They are customary among people like me; I don't lower myself in doing like everybody else. I was not the inventor of them, and it would be most absurd and stupid in me not to conform to them. Of course, I know very well that if you go to certain principles of some morality or other, which all the world have in their mouths, and which none of them practise, you will find black is white, and white will become black. But, my philosopher, there is a general conscience, just as there is a general grammar; and then the exceptions in each language that you learned people call — what is it you call them?

I. — Idioms.

He. — Ah, exactly; well, each condition of life has its exceptions to the general conscience, to which I should like to give the title of idioms of vocation.

I. — I understand. Fontenelle speaks well, writes well, though his style swarms with French *idioms*.

He. — And the sovereign, the minister, the banker, the magistrate, the soldier, the man of letters, the lawyer, the merchant, the artisan, the singing master, the dancing master, are all most worthy folk, though their practice strays in some points from the general conscience, and abounds in moral idioms. The older the institution, the more the idioms; the worse the times, the more do idioms multiply. The man is worth so much, his trade is worth the same; and reciprocally. At last, the trade counts for so much, the man for the same. So people take care to make the trade go for as much as they can.

I. — All that I gather clearly from this twisted stuff is, that there are very few callings honestly carried on, and very few honest men in their callings.

He. — Good, there are none at all; but in revenge, there are few rogues out of their own shops; and all would go excellently but for a certain number of persons who are called assiduous, exact, fulfilling their strict

duty most rigorously, or, what comes to the same thing, for ever in their shops, and carrying on their trade from morning until night, and doing nothing else in the world. So they are the only people who grow rich and are esteemed.

I. — By force of idioms.

He. — That is it; I see you understand me. Now, an idiom that belongs to nearly all conditions — for there are some that are common to all countries and all times, just as there are follies that are universal — a common idiom, is to procure for one's self as many customers as one possibly can; a common folly is to believe that he is cleverest who has most of them. There are two exceptions to the general conscience, with which you must comply. There is a kind of credit; it is nothing in itself, but it is made worth something by opinion. They say, *good character is better than golden girdle*: yet the man who has a good character has not a golden girdle, and I see nowadays that the golden girdle hardly stands in much need of character. One ought, if possible, to have both girdle and character, and that is my object when I give myself importance by what you describe as vile arts, and poor unworthy tricks. I give my lesson and I give it well; behold the general rule. I make them think I have more lessons to give than the day has hours; behold the idiom.

I. — And the lesson; you do give it well?

He. — Yes, not ill; passably. The thorough bass of the dear master has simplified all that. In old days I used to steal my pupil's money. Yes, I stole it, that is certain; now I earn it, at least like my neighbours.

I. — And did you steal it without remorse?

He. — Oh, without remorse. They say that if one thief pilfers from another, the devil laughs. The parents were bursting with a fortune, which had been got the Lord knows how. They were people about the court, financiers, great merchants, bankers. I helped to make them disgorge, I and

the rest of the people they employed. In nature, all species devour one another; so all ranks devour one another in society. We do justice on one another, without any meddling from the law. The other day it was Deschamps, now it is Guimard, who avenges the prince of the financier; and it is the milliner, the jeweller, the upholsterer, the hosier, the draper, the lady's-maid, the cook, the saddler, who avenge the financier of Deschamps. In the midst of it all, there is only the imbecile or the sloth who suffers injury without inflicting it. Whence you see that these exceptions to the general conscience, or these moral idioms about which they make such a stir, are nothing, after all, and that you only need to take a clear survey of the whole.

I. — I admire yours.

He. — And then misery! The voice of conscience and of honour is terribly weak, when the stomach calls out. Enough to say that if ever I grow rich I shall be bound to restore, and I have made up my mind to restore in every possible fashion, by eating, drinking, gambling, and whatever else you please.

I. — I have some fears about your ever growing rich.

He. — I have suspicions myself.

I. — But if things should fall so, what then?

He. — I would do like all other beggars set on horseback: I would be the most insolent ruffler that has ever been seen. Then I should recall all that they have made me go through, and should pay them back with good interest all the advances that they have been good enough to make me. I am fond of command, and I will command. I am fond of praise, and I will make them praise me. I will have in my pay the whole troop of flatterers, parasites, and buffoons, and I'll say to them, as has been said to me: "Come, knaves, let me be amused," and amused I shall be; "Pull me some honest folk to pieces," and so they will be, if honest folk can be found. We will be

jolly over our cups, we will have all sorts of vices and whimsies; it will be delicious. We will prove that Voltaire has no genius; that Buffon, everlastingly perched upon his stilts, is only a turgid declaimer; that Montesquieu is nothing more than a man with a touch of ingenuity; we will send D'Alembert packing to his fusty mathematics. We will welcome before and behind all the pigmy Catos like you, whose modesty is the prop of pride, and whose sobriety is a fine name for not being able to help yourselves.

I. — From the worthy use to which you would put your riches, I perceive what a pity it is that you are a beggar. You would live thus in a manner that would be eminently honourable to the human race, eminently useful to your countrymen, and eminently glorious for yourself.

He. — You are mocking me, sir philosopher. But you do not know whom you are laughing at. You do not suspect that at this moment I represent the most important part of the town and the court. Our millionaires in all ranks have, or have not, said to themselves exactly the same things as I have just confided to you; but the fact is, the life that I should lead is precisely their life. What a notion you people have; you think that the same sort of happiness is made for all the world. What a strange vision! Yours supposes a certain romantic spirit that we know nothing of, a singular character, a peculiar taste. You adorn this incongruous mixture with the name of philosophy; but now, are virtue and philosophy made for all the world? He has them who can get them, and he keeps them who can. Imagine the universe sage and philosophical; agree that it would be a most diabolically gloomy spot. Come, long live philosophy! The wisdom of Solomon for ever! To drink good wines, to cram one's self with dainty dishes, to rest in beds of down: except that, all, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.

I. — What, to defend one's native land?

He. — Vanity; there is native land no more; I see nought from pole to pole but tyrants and slaves.

I. — To help one's friends?

He. — Vanity; has one any friends? If one had, ought we to turn them into ingrates? Look well, and you will see that this is all you get by doing services. Gratitude is a burden, and every burden is made to be shaken off.

I. — To have a position in society and fulfil its duties?

He. — Vanity; what matters it whether you have a position or not, provided you are rich, since you only seek a position to become rich? To fulfil one's duties, what does that lead to? To jealousy, trouble, persecution. Is that the way to get on? Nay, indeed: to see the great, to court them, study their taste, bow to their fancies, serve their vices, praise their injustice — there is the secret.

I. — To watch the education of one's children?

He. — Vanity; that is a tutor's business.

I. — But if this tutor, having picked up his principles from you, happens to neglect his duties, who will pay the penalty?

He. — Not I, at any rate, but most likely the husband of my daughter, or the wife of my son.

I. — But suppose that they both plunge into vice and debauchery?

He. — That belongs to their position.

I. — Suppose they bring themselves into dishonour?

He. — You never come into dishonour, if you are rich, whatever you do.

I. — Suppose they ruin themselves?

He. — So much the worse for them.

I. — You will not pay much heed to your wife?

He. — None whatever, if you please. The best compliment, I think, that a man can pay his dearer half, is to do what pleases himself. In your opinion,

would not society be mightily amusing if everybody in it was always attending to his duties?

I. — Why not? The evening is never so fair to me as when I am satisfied with my morning.

He. — And to me also.

I. — What makes the men of the world so dainty in their amusements, is their profound idleness.

He. — Pray do not think that; they are full of trouble.

I. — As they never tire themselves, they are never refreshed.

He. — Don't suppose that either. They are incessantly worn out.

I. — Pleasure is always a business for them, never the satisfaction of a necessity.

He. — So much the better; necessity is always a trouble.

I. — They wear everything out. Their soul gets blunted, weariness seizes them. A man who should take their life in the midst of all their crushing abundance would do them a kindness. The only part of happiness that they know is the part that loses its edge. I do not despise the pleasures of the senses: I have a palate, too, and it is tickled by a well-seasoned dish or a fine wine; I have a heart and eyes, and I like to see a handsome woman. Sometimes with my friends, a gay party, even if it waxes somewhat tumultuous, does not displease me. But I will not dissemble from you that it is infinitely pleasanter to me to have succoured the unfortunate, to have ended some thorny business, to have given wholesome counsel, done some pleasant reading, taken a walk with some man or woman dear to me, passed instructive hours with my children, written a good page, fulfilled the duties of my position, said to the woman that I love a few soft things that bring her arm round my neck. I know actions which I would give all that I possess to have done. *Mahomet* is a sublime work; I would a hundred times rather have got justice for the memory of the Calas. A person of my acquaintance

fled to Carthagena; he was the younger son in a country where custom transfers all the property to the eldest. There he learns that his eldest brother, a petted son, after having despoiled his father and mother of all that they possessed, had driven them out of the castle, and that the poor old souls were languishing in indigence in some small country town. What does he do — this younger son who in consequence of the harsh treatment he had received at the hand of his parents had gone to seek his fortune far away? He sends them help; he makes haste to set his affairs in order, he returns with his riches, he restores his father and mother to their home, and finds husbands for his sisters. Ah, my dear Rameau, that man looked upon this period as the happiest in his life; he had tears in his eyes when he spoke to me of it, and even as I tell you the story, I feel my heart beat faster, and my tongue falter for sympathy.

He. — Singular beings, you are!

I.— 'Tis you who are beings much to be pitied, if you cannot imagine that one rises above one's lot, and that it is impossible to be unhappy under the shelter of good actions.

He. — That is a kind of felicity with which I should find it hard to familiarise myself, for we do not often come across it. But, then, according to you, we should be good.

I. — To be happy, assuredly.

He. — Yet I see an infinity of honest people who are not happy, and an infinity of people who are happy without being honest.

I. — You think so.

He. — And is it not for having had common sense and frankness for a moment, that I don't know where to go for a supper to-night?

I. — Nay, it is for not having had it always; it is because you did not perceive in good time that one ought first and foremost to provide a resource independent of servitude.

He. — Independent or not, the resource I had provided is at any rate the most comfortable.

I. — And the least sure and least decent.

He. — But the most conformable to my character of sloth, madman, and good-for-nought.

I. — Just so.

He. — And since I can secure my happiness by vices which are natural to me, which I have acquired without labour, which I preserve without effort, which go well with the manners of my nation, which are to the taste of those who protect me, and are more in harmony with their small private necessities than virtues which would weary them by being a standing accusation against them from morning to night, why, it would be very singular for me to go and torment myself like a lost spirit, for the sake of making myself into somebody other than I am, to put on a character foreign to my own, and qualities which I will admit to be highly estimable, in order to avoid discussion, but which it would cost me a great deal to acquire, and a great deal to practise, and would lead to nothing, or possibly to worse than nothing, through the continual satire of the rich among whom beggars like me have to seek their subsistence. We praise virtue, but we hate it, and shun it, and know very well that it freezes the marrow of our bones — and in this world one must have one's feet warm. And then all that would infallibly fill me with ill-humour; for why do we so constantly see religious people so harsh, so querulous, so unsociable? 'Tis because they have imposed a task upon themselves which is not natural to them. They suffer, and when people suffer, they make others suffer too. That is not my game, nor that of my protectors either; I have to be gay, supple, amusing, comical. Virtue makes itself respected, and respect is inconvenient; virtue insists on being admired, and admiration is not amusing. I have to do with people who are bored, and I must make them laugh. Now it is absurdity and madness which make

people laugh, so mad and absurd I must be; and even if nature had not made me so, the simplest plan would still be to feign it. Happily, I have no need to play hypocrite; there are so many already of all colours, without reckoning those who play hypocrite with themselves.... If your friend Rameau were to apply himself to show his contempt for fortune, and women, and good cheer, and idleness, and to begin to Catonise, what would he be but a hypocrite? Rameau must be what he is — a lucky rascal among rascals swollen with riches, and not a mighty paragon of virtue, or even a virtuous man, eating his dry crust of bread, either alone, or by the side of a pack of beggars. And, to cut it short, I do not get on with your felicity, or with the happiness of a few visionaries like yourself.

I. — I see, my friend, that you do not even know what it is, and that you are not even made to understand it.

He. — So much the better, I declare; so much the better. It would make me burst with hunger and weariness, and may be, with remorse.

I. — Very well, then, the only advice I have to give you, is to find your way back as quickly as you can into the house from which your impudence drove you out.

He. — And to do what you do not disapprove absolutely and yet is a little repugnant to me relatively?

I. — What a singularity!

He. — Nothing singular in it at all; I wish to be abject, but I wish to be so without constraint. I do not object to descend from my dignity.... You laugh?

I. — Yes, your dignity makes me laugh.

He. — Everybody has his own dignity. I do not object to come down from mine, but it must be in my own way, and not at the bidding of others. Must they be able to say to me, Crawl — and behold me, forced to crawl? That is the worm’s way, and it is mine; we both of us follow it — the worm

and I — when they leave us alone, but we turn when they tread on our tails. They have trodden on my tail, and I mean to turn. And then you have no idea of the creature we are talking about. Imagine a sour and melancholy person, eaten up by vapours, wrapped twice or thrice round in his dressing-gown, discontented with himself, and discontented with every one else; out of whom you hardly wring a smile, if you put your body and soul out of joint in a hundred different ways; who examines with a cold considering eye the droll grimaces of my face, and those of my mind, which are droller still. I may torment myself to attain the highest sublime of the lunatic asylum, nothing comes of it. Will he laugh, or will he not? That is what I am obliged to keep saying to myself in the midst of my contortions; and you may judge how damaging this uncertainty is to one's talent. My hypochondriac, with his head buried in a night-cap that covers his eyes, has the air of an immovable pagod, with a string tied to its chin, and going down under his chair. You wait for the string to be pulled, and it is not pulled; or if by chance the jaws open, it is only to articulate some word that shows he has not seen you, and that all your drolleries have been thrown away. This word is the answer to some question which you put to him four days before; the word spoken, the mastoid muscle contracts, and the jaw sticks.

[Then he set himself to imitate his man. He placed himself on a chair, his head fixed, his hat coming over his eyebrows, his eyes half-shut, his arms hanging down, moving his jaw up and down like an automaton:] Gloomy, obscure, oracular as destiny itself — such is our patron.

At the other side of the room is a prude who plays at importance, to whom one could bring one's self to say that she is pretty, because she is pretty, though she has a blemish or two upon her face. *Item*, she is more spiteful, more conceited, and more silly than a goose. *Item*, she insists on having wit. *Item*, you have to persuade her that you believe she has more of

it than anybody else in the world. *Item*, she knows nothing, and she has a turn for settling everything out of hand. *Item*, you must applaud her decisions with feet and hands, jump for joy, and scream with admiration:— "How fine that is, how delicate, well said, subtly seen, singularly felt! Where do women get that? Without study, by mere force of instinct, and pure light of nature! That is really like a miracle! And then they want us to believe that experience, study, reflection, education, have anything to do with the matter!..." And other fooleries to match, and tears and tears of joy; ten times a day to kneel down, one knee bent in front of the other, the other leg drawn back, the arms extended towards the goddess, to seek one's desire in her eyes, to hang on her lips, to wait for her command, and then start off like a flash of lightning. Where is the man who would subject himself to play such a part, if it is not the wretch, who finds there two or three times a week the wherewithal to still the tribulation of his inner parts?

I. — I should never have thought you were so fastidious.

He. — I am not. In the beginning I watched the others, and I did as they did, even rather better, because I am more frankly impudent, a better comedian, hungrier, and better off for lungs. I descend apparently in a direct line from the famous Stentor....

[And to give me a just idea of the force of his organ, he set off laughing, with violence enough to break the windows of the coffee-house, and to interrupt the chess-players.]

I. — But what is the good of this talent?

He. — You cannot guess?

I. — No; I am rather slow.

He. — Suppose the debate opened, and victory uncertain; I get up, and, displaying my thunder, I say: "That is as mademoiselle asserts.... That is worth calling a judgment. There is genius in the expression." But one must not always approve in the same manner; one would be monotonous, and

seem insincere, and become insipid. You only escape that by judgment and resource; you must know how to prepare and place your major and most peremptory tones, to seize the occasion and the moment. When, for instance, there is a difference in feeling, and the debate has risen to its last degree of violence, and you have ceased to listen to one another, and all speak at the same time, you ought to have your place at the corner of the room which is farthest removed from the field of battle, to have prepared the way for your explosion by a long silence, and then suddenly to fall like a thunder-clap over the very midst of the combatants. Nobody possesses this art as I do. But where I am truly surprising is in the opposite way — I have low tones that I accompany with a smile, and an infinite variety of approving tricks of face; nose, lips, brow, eyes, all make play; I have a suppleness of reins, a manner of twisting the spine, of shrugging the shoulders, extending the fingers, inclining the head, closing the eyes, and throwing myself into a state of stupefaction, as if I had heard a divine angelic voice come down from heaven; that is what flatters. I do not know whether you seize rightly all the energy of that last attitude. I did not invent it, but nobody has ever surpassed me in its execution. Behold, behold!

I. — Truly, it is unique.

He. — Think you there is a woman's brain that could stand that?

I. — It must be admitted that you have carried the talent of playing the madman, and of self-debasement, as far as it can possibly be carried.

He. — Try as hard as they will, they will never touch me — not the best of them. Palissot, for instance, will never be more than a good learner. But if this part is amusing at first, and if you have some relish in inwardly mocking at the folly of the people whom you are intoxicating, in the long run that ceases to be exciting, and then after a certain number of discoveries one is obliged to repeat one's self. Wit and art have their limits. 'Tis only

God Almighty and some rare geniuses, for whom the career widens as they advance.

I. — With this precious enthusiasm for fine things, and this facility of genius of yours, is it possible that you have invented nothing?

He. — Pardon me; for instance, that admiring attitude of the back, of which I spoke to you; I regard it as my own, though envy may contest my claim. I daresay it has been employed before: but who has felt how convenient it was for laughing in one's sleeve at the ass for whom one was dying of admiration! I have more than a hundred ways of opening fire on a girl under the very eyes of her mother, without the latter suspecting a jot of it; yes, and even of making her an accomplice. I had hardly begun my career before I disdained all the vulgar fashions of slipping a *billet-doux*; I have ten ways of having them taken from me, and out of the number I venture to flatter myself there are some that are new. I possess in an especial degree the gift of encouraging a timid young man; I have secured success for some who had neither wit nor good looks. If all that was written down, I fancy people would concede me some genius.

I. — And would do you singular honour.

He. — I don't doubt it.

I. — In your place, I would put those famous methods on paper. It would be a pity for them to be lost.

He. — It is true; but you could never suppose how little I think of method and precepts. He who needs a protocol will never go far. Your genius reads little, experiments much, and teaches himself. Look at Cæsar, Turenne, Vauban, the Marquise de Tencin, her brother the cardinal, and the cardinal's secretary, the Abbé Trublet, and Bouret! Who is it that has given lessons to Bouret? Nobody; 'tis nature that forms these rare men.

I. — Well, but you might do this in your lost hours, when the anguish of your empty stomach, or the weariness of your stomach overloaded, banishes

slumber.

He. — I'll think of it. It is better to write great things than to execute small ones. Then the soul rises on wings, the imagination is kindled; whereas it shrivels in amazement at the applause which the absurd public lavishes so perversely on that mincing creature of a Dangeville, who plays so flatly, who walks the stage nearly bent double, who stares affectedly and incessantly into the eyes of every one she talks to, and who takes her grimaces for finesse, and her little strut for grace; or on that emphatic Clairon, who becomes more studied, more pretentious, more elaborately heavy, than I can tell you. That imbecile of a pit claps hands to the echo, and never sees that we are a mere worsted ball of daintinesses ('Tis true the ball grows a trifle big, but what does it matter?), that we have the finest skin, the finest eyes, the prettiest bill; little feeling inside, in truth; a step that is not exactly light, but which for all that is not as awkward as they say. As for sentiment, on the other hand, there is not one of these stage dames whom we cannot cap.

I. — What do you mean by all that? Is it irony or truth?

He. — The worst of it is that this deuced sentiment is all internal, and not a glimpse of it appears outside; but I who am now talking to you, I know, and know well, that she has it. If it is not that, you should see, if a fit of ill-humour comes on, how we treat the valets, how the waiting-maids are cuffed and trounced, what kicks await our good friend, if he fails in an atom of that respect which is our due. 'Tis a little demon, I tell you, full of sentiment and dignity. Ah, you don't quite know where you are, eh?

I. — I confess I can hardly make out whether you are speaking in good faith or in malice. I am a plain man. Be kind enough to be a little more outspoken, and to leave your art behind for once....

He. — What is it? why it is what we retail before our little patroness about the Dangeville or the Clairon, mixed up here and there with a word or

two to put you on the scent. I will allow you to take me for a good-for-nothing, but not for a fool; and ’tis only a fool, or a man eaten up with conceit, who could say such a parcel of impertinences seriously.

I. — But how do people ever bring themselves to say them?

He. — It is not done all at once, but little by little you come to it. *Ingenii largitor venter.*

I. — Then hunger must press you very hard.

He. — That may be; yet strong as you may think them, be sure that those to whom they are addressed are much more accustomed to listen to them than we are to hazard them.

I. — Is there anybody who has courage to be of your opinion?

He. — What do you mean by anybody? It is the sentiment and language of the whole of society.

I. — Those of you who are not great rascals must be great fools.

He. — Fools! I assure you there is only one, and that is he who feasts us to cheat him.

I. — But how can people allow themselves to be cheated in such gross fashion? For surely the superiority of the Dangeville and the Clairon is a settled thing.

He. — We swallow until we are full to the throat any lie that flatters us, and take drop by drop a truth that is bitter to us. And then we have the air of being so profoundly penetrated, so true.

I. — Yet you must once, at any rate, have sinned against the principles of art, and let slip, by an oversight, some of those bitter truths that wound; for, in spite of the wretched, abject, vile, abominable part you play, I believe you have at bottom some delicacy of soul.

He. — I! not the least in the world. Deuce take me if I know what I am! In a general way, I have a mind as round as a ball, and a character fresh as a water-willow. Never false, little interest as I have in being true; never true,

little interest as I have in being false. I say things just as they come into my head; sensible things, then so much the better; impertinent things, then people take no notice. I let my natural frankness have full play. I never in all my life gave a thought, either beforehand, what to say, or while I was saying it, or after I had said it. And so I offend nobody.

I. — Still that did happen with the worthy people among whom you used to live, and who were so kind to you.

He. — What would you have? It is a mishap, an unlucky moment, such as there always are in life; there is no such thing as unbroken bliss: I was too well off, it could not last. We have, as you know, the most numerous and the best chosen company. It is a school of humanity, the renewal of hospitality after the antique. All the poets who fall, we pick them up; all decried musicians, all the authors who are never read, all the actresses who are hissed, a parcel of beggarly, disgraced, stupid, parasitical souls, and at the head of them all I have the honour of being the brave chief of a timorous flock. It is I who exhort them to eat the first time they come, and I who ask for drink for them — they are so shy. A few young men in rags who do not know where to lay their heads, but who have good looks; a few scoundrels who bamboozle the master of the house, and put him to sleep, for the sake of gleaning after him in the fields of the mistress of the house. We seem gay, but at bottom we are devoured by spleen and a raging appetite. Wolves are not more famishing, nor tigers more cruel. Like wolves when the ground has been long covered with snow, we raven over our food, and whatever succeeds we rend like tigers. Never was seen such a collection of soured, malignant, venomous beasts. You hear nothing but the names of Buffon, Duclos, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Voltaire, D'Alembert, Diderot; and God knows the epithets that bear them company! Nobody can have any parts if he is not as stupid as ourselves. That is the plan on which Palissot's play of

The Philosophers has been conceived. And you are not spared in it, any more than your neighbours.

I. — So much the better. Perhaps they do me more honour than I deserve. I should be humiliated if those who speak ill of so many clever and worthy people took it into their heads to speak well of me.

He. — Everybody must pay his scot. After sacrificing the greater animals, then we immolate the others.

I. — Insulting science and virtue for a living, that is dearly-earned bread!

He. — I have already told you, we are without any consistency; we insult all the world, and afflict nobody. We have sometimes the heavy Abbé d'Olivet, the big Abbé Le Blanc, the hypocrite Batteux. The big abbé is only spiteful before he has had his dinner; his coffee taken, he throws himself into an arm-chair, his feet against the ledge of the fireplace, and sleeps like an old parrot on its perch. If the noise becomes violent he yawns, stretches his arms, rubs his eyes, and says: "Well, well, what is it?" "It is whether Piron has more wit than Voltaire." "Let us understand; is it wit that you are talking about, or is it taste? For as to taste, your Piron has not a suspicion of it." "Not a suspicion of it?" "No." And there we are, embarked in a dissertation upon taste. Then the patron makes a sign with his hand for people to listen to him, for if he piques himself upon one thing more than another, it is taste. "Taste," he says, "taste is a thing...." But, on my soul, I don't know what thing he said that it was, nor does he.

Then sometimes we have friend Robbé. He regales us with his equivocal stories, with the miracles of the convulsionnaires which he has seen with his own eyes, and with some cantos of a poem on a subject that he knows thoroughly. His verses I detest, but I love to hear him recite them — he has the air of an energumen. They all cry out around him: "There is a poet worth calling a poet!..."

Then there comes to us also a certain noodle with a dull and stupid air, but who has the keenness of a demon, and is more mischievous than an old monkey. He is one of those figures that provoke pleasantries and sarcasms, and that God made for the chastisement of those who judge by appearances, and who ought to have learnt from the mirror that it is as easy to be a wit with the air of a fool as to hide a fool under the air of a wit. 'Tis a very common piece of cowardice to immolate a good man to the amusement of the others; people never fail to turn to this man; he is a snare that we set for the new-comers, and I have scarcely known one of them who was not caught ...

[I was sometimes amazed at the justice of my madman's observations on men and characters, and I showed him my surprise.] That is, he answered, because one derives good out of bad company, as one does out of libertinism. You are recompensed for the loss of your innocence by that of your prejudices; in the society of the bad, where vice shows itself without a mask, you learn to understand them. And then I have read a little.

I. — What have you read?

He. — I have read, and I read, and I read over and over again Theophrastus and La Bruyère and Molière.

I. — Excellent works, all of them.

He. — They are far better than people suppose; but who is there who knows how to read them?

I. — Everybody does, according to the measure of his intelligence.

He. — No; hardly anybody. Could you tell me what people look for in them?

I. — Amusement and instruction.

He. — But what instruction, for that is the point?

I. — The knowledge of one's duties, the love of virtue, the hatred of vice.

He. — For my part, I gather from them all that one ought to do, and all that one ought not to say. Thus, when I read the *Avare*, I say to myself: "Be a miser if thou wilt, but beware of talking like the miser." When I read *Tartufe*, I say: "Be a hypocrite if thou wilt, but do not talk like a hypocrite. Keep the vices that are useful to thee, but avoid their tone and the appearances that would make thee laughable." To preserve thyself from such a tone and such appearances, it is necessary to know what they are. Now these authors have drawn excellent pictures of them. I am myself, and I remain what I am, but I act and I speak as becomes the character. I am not one of those who despise moralists; there is a great deal of profit to be got from them, especially with those who have applied morality to action. Vice only hurts men from time to time; the characteristics of vice hurt them from morning to night. Perhaps it would be better to be insolent than to have an insolent expression. One who is insolent in character only insults people now and again; one who is insolent in expression insults them incessantly. And do not imagine that I am the only reader of my kind. I have no other merit in this respect than having done on system, from a natural integrity of understanding, and with true and reasonable vision, what most others do by instinct. And so their readings make them no better than I am, and they remain ridiculous in spite of themselves, while I am only so when I choose, and always leave them a vast distance behind me; for the same art which teaches me how to escape ridicule on certain occasions teaches me also on certain others how to incur it happily. Then I recall to myself all that the others said, and all that I read, and I add all that issues from my own originality, which is in this kind wondrous fertile.

I. — You have done well to reveal these mysteries to me, for otherwise I should have thought you self-contradictory.

He. — I am not so in the least, for against a single time when one has to avoid ridicule, happily there are a hundred when one has to provoke it.

There is no better part among the great people than that of fool. For a long time there was the king's fool; at no time was there ever the king's sage, officially so styled. Now I am the fool of Bertin and many others, perhaps yours at the present moment, or perhaps you are mine. A man who meant to be a sage would have no fool, so he who has a fool is no sage; if he is not a sage he is a fool, and perhaps, even were he the king himself, the fool of his fool. For the rest, remember that in a matter so variable as manners, there is nothing absolutely, essentially, and universally true or false; if not that one must be what interest would have us be, good or bad, wise or mad, decent or ridiculous, honest or vicious. If virtue had happened to be the way to fortune, then I should either have been virtuous, or I should have pretended virtue, like other persons. As it was, they wanted me to be ridiculous, and I made myself so; as for being vicious, nature alone had taken all the trouble that was needed in that. When I use the term vicious, it is for the sake of talking your language; for, if we came to explanations, it might happen that you called vice what I call virtue, and virtue what I call vice.

Then we have the authors of the Opéra Comique, their actors and their actresses, and oftener still their managers, all people of resource and superior merit. And I forget the whole clique of scribblers in the gazettes, the *Avant Coureur*, the *Petites Affiches*, the *Année littéraire*, the *Observateur littéraire*.

I. — The *Année littéraire*, the *Observateur littéraire*! But they detest one another.

He. — Quite true, but all beggars are reconciled at the porringer. That cursed *Observateur littéraire*, I wish the devil had had both him and his sheet! It was that dog of a miserly priest who caused my disaster. He appeared on our horizon for the first time; he arrived at the hour that drives us all out of our dens, the hour for dinner. When it is bad weather, lucky the man among us who has a shilling in his pocket to pay for a hackney-coach!

He is free to laugh at a comrade for coming besplashed up to his eyes and wet to the skin, though at night he goes to his own home in just the same plight. There was one of them some months ago who had a violent brawl with the Savoyard at the door. They had a running account; the creditor insisted on being paid, and the debtor was not in funds, and yet he could not go upstairs without passing through the hands of the other.

Dinner is served; they do the honours of the table to the abbé — they place him at the upper end. I come in and see this. "What, abbé, you preside? That is all very well for to-day, but to-morrow you will come down, if you please, by one plate; the day after by another plate, and so on from plate to plate, now to right and now to left, until from the place that I occupied one time before you, Fréron once after me, Dorat once after Fréron, Palissot once after Dorat, you become stationary beside me, poor rascal as you are — *che siedo sempre come*" — [an Italian proverb not to be decently reproduced].

The abbé, who is a good fellow, and takes everything in good part, bursts out laughing; Mademoiselle, struck by my observation and by the aptness of my comparison, bursts out laughing; everybody to right and left burst out laughing, except the master of the house, who flies into a huff, and uses language that would have meant nothing if we had been by ourselves —

"Rameau, you are an impertinent."

"I know I am, and it is on that condition that I was received here."

"You are a scoundrel."

"Like anybody else."

"A beggar."

"Should I be here, if I were not?"

"I will have you turned out of doors."

"After dinner I will go of my own will."

"I recommend you to go."

We dined: I did not lose a single toothful. After eating well and drinking amply, for after all Messer Gaster is a person with whom I have never sulked, I made up my mind what to do, and I prepared to go; I had pledged my word in presence of so many people that I was bound to keep it. For a considerable time I hunted up and down the room for my hat and cane in every corner where they were not likely to be, reckoning all the time that the master of the house would break out into a new torrent of injuries, that somebody would interpose, and that we should at last make friends by sheer dint of altercation. I turned on this side and that, for I had nothing on my heart; but the master, more sombre and dark-browed than Homer's Apollo as he lets his arrows fly among the Greeks, with his cap plucked farther over his head than usual, marched backwards and forwards up and down the room. Mademoiselle approaches me: "But, mademoiselle," say I, "what has happened beyond what happens every day? Have I been different from what I am on other days?"

"I insist on his leaving the house."— "I am leaving.... But I have given no ground of offence."— "Pardon me; we invite the abbé and...." It was he who was wrong to invite the abbé, while at the same time he was receiving me, and with me so many other creatures of my sort.— "Come, friend Rameau, you must beg the abbé's pardon."— "I shall not know what to do with his pardon."— "Come, come, all will be right." — They take me by the hand, and drag me towards the abbé's chair; I look at him with a kind of admiring wonder, for who before ever asked pardon of the abbé? "All this is very absurd, abbé; confess, is it not?" And then I laugh, and the abbé laughs too. So that is my forgiveness on that side; but I had next to approach the other, and that was a very different thing. I forget exactly how it was that I framed my apology.— "Sir, here is the madman...."— "He has made me suffer too long; I wish to hear no more about him."— "He is sorry."— "Yes, I am very sorry."— "It shall not happen again."— "Until the first rascal...."

— I do not know whether he was in one of those days of ill-humour when mademoiselle herself dreads to go near him, or whether he misunderstood what I said, or whether I said something wrong: things were worse than before. Good heavens, does he not know me? Does he not know that I am like children, and that there are some circumstances in which I let anything and everything escape me? And then, God help me, am I not to have a moment of relief? Why, it would wear out a puppet made of steel, to keep pulling the string from night to morning, and from morning to night! I must amuse them, of course, that is the condition; but I must now and then amuse myself. In the midst of these distractions there came into my head a fatal idea, an idea that gave me confidence, that inspired me with pride and insolence: it was that they could not do without me, and that I was indispensable.

I. — Yes, I daresay that you are very useful to them, but that they are still more useful to you. You will not find as good a house every day; but they, for one madman who falls short, will find a hundred to take his place.

He. — A hundred madmen like me, sir philosopher; they are not so common, I can tell you! Flat fools — yes. People are harder to please in folly than in talent or virtue. I am a rarity in my own kind, a great rarity. Now that they have me no longer, what are they doing? They find time as heavy as if they were dogs. I am an inexhaustible bagful of impertinences. Every minute I had some fantastic notion that made them laugh till they cried; I was a whole Bedlam in myself.

I. — Well, at any rate you had bed and board, coat and breeches, shoes, and a pistole a month.

He. — That is the profit side of the account; you say not a word of the cost of it all. First, if there was a whisper of a new piece (no matter how bad the weather), one had to ransack all the garrets in Paris, until one had found the author; then to get a reading of the play, and adroitly to insinuate that

there was a part in it which would be rendered in a superior manner by a certain person of my acquaintance.— “And by whom, if you please?”— “By whom? a pretty question! There are graces, finesse, elegance.”— “Ah, you mean Mademoiselle Dangeville? Perhaps you know her?”— “Yes, a little; but ’tis not she.”— “Who is it, then?” — I whispered the name very low. “She?”— “Yes, she,” I repeated with some shame, for sometimes I do feel a touch of shame; and at this name you should have seen how long the poet’s face grew, if indeed he did not burst out laughing in my face. Still, whether he would or not, I was bound to take my man to dine; and he, being naturally afraid of pledging himself, drew back, and tried to say “No, thank you.” You should have seen how I was treated, if I did not succeed in my negotiation! I was a blockhead, a fool, a rascal; I was not good for a single thing; I was not worth the glass of water which they gave me to drink. It was still worse at their performance, when I had to go intrepidly amid the cries of a public that has a good judgment of its own, whatever may be said about it, and make my solitary clap of the hand audible, draw every eye to me, and sometimes save the actress from hisses, and hear people murmur around me— “He is one of the valets in disguise belonging to the man who.... Will that knave be quiet?” They do not know what brings a man to that; they think it is stupidity, but there is one motive that excuses anything.

I. — Even the infraction of the civil laws.

He. — At length, however, I became known, and people used to say: “Oh, it is Rameau!” My resource was to throw out some words of irony to save my solitary applause from ridicule, by making them interpret it in an opposite sense.

Now agree that one must have a mighty interest to make one thus brave the assembled public, and that each of these pieces of hard labour was worth more than a paltry crown? And then at home there was a pack of dogs to tend, and cats for which I was responsible. I was only too happy if

Micou favoured me with a stroke of his claw that tore my cuff or my wrist. Criquette is liable to colic; ’tis I who have to rub her. In old days mademoiselle used to have the vapours; to-day, it is her nerves. She is beginning to grow a little stout; you should hear the fine tales they make out of this.

I. — You do not belong to people of this sort, at any rate?

He. — Why not?

I. — Because it is indecent to throw ridicule on one’s benefactors.

He. — But is it not worse still to take advantage of one’s benefits to degrade the receiver of them?

I. — But if the receiver of them were not vile in himself, nothing would give the benefactor the chance.

He. — But if the personages were not ridiculous in themselves they would not make subjects for good tales. And then, is it my fault if they mix with rascaldom? Is it my fault if, after mixing themselves up with rascaldom, they are betrayed and made fools of? When people resolve to live with people like us, if they have common sense, there is an infinite quantity of blackness for which they must make up their minds. When they take us, do they not know us for what we are, for the most interested, vile, and perfidious of souls. Then if they know us, all is well. There is a tacit compact that they shall treat us well, and that sooner or later we shall treat them ill in return for the good that they have done us. Does not such an agreement subsist between a man and his monkey or his parrot?... If you take a young provincial to the menagerie at Versailles, and he takes it into his head for a freak to push his hands between the bars of the cage of the tiger or the panther, whose fault is it? It is all written in the silent compact, and so much the worse for the man who forgets or ignores it. How I could justify by this universal and sacred compact the people whom you accuse of wickedness, whereas it is in truth yourselves whom you ought to accuse of

folly.... But while we execute the just decrees of Providence on folly, you who paint us as we are, you execute its just decrees on us. What would you think of us, if we claimed, with our shameless manners, to enjoy public consideration? That we are out of our senses. And those who look for decent behaviour from people who are born vicious and with vile and bad characters — are they in their senses? Everything has its true wages in this world. There are two Public Prosecutors, one at your door, chastising offences against society; nature is the other. Nature knows all the vices that escape the laws. Give yourself up to debauchery, and you will end with dropsy; if you are crapulous, your lungs will find you out; if you open your door to ragamuffins, and live in their company, you will be betrayed, laughed at, despised. The shortest way is to resign, one's self to the equity of these judgments, and to say to one's self: That is as it should be; to shake one's ears and turn over a new leaf, or else to remain what one is, but on the conditions aforesaid....

I. — You cannot doubt what judgment I pass on such a character as yours?

He. — Not at all; I am in your eyes an abject and most despicable creature; and I am sometimes the same in my own eyes, though not often: I more frequently congratulate myself on my vices than blame myself for them; you are more constant in your contempt.

I. — True; but why show me all your turpitude?

He. — First, because you already know a good deal of it, and I saw that there was more to gain than to lose, by confessing the rest.

I. — How so, if you please?

He. — It is important in some lines of business to reach sublimity; it is especially so in evil. People spit upon a small rogue, but they cannot refuse a kind of consideration to a great criminal; his courage amazes you, his

atrocity makes you shudder. In all things, what people prize is unity of character.

I. — But this estimable unity of character you have not quite got: I find you from time to time vacillating in your principles; it is uncertain whether you get your wickedness from nature or study, and whether study has brought you as far as possible.

He. — I agree with you, but I have done my best. Have I not had the modesty to recognise persons more perfect in my own line than myself. Have I not spoken to you of Bouret with the deepest admiration? Bouret is the first person in the world for me.

I. — But after Bouret you come.

He. — No.

I. — Palissot, then?

He. — Palissot, but not Palissot alone.

I. — And who is worthy to share the second rank with him?

He. — The Renegade of Avignon.

I. — I never heard of the Renegade of Avignon, but he must be an astonishing man.

He. — He is so, indeed.

I. — The history of great personages has always interested me.

He. — I can well believe it. This hero lived in the house of a good and worthy descendant of Abraham, promised to the father of the faithful in number equal to the stars in the heavens.

I. — In the house of a Jew?

He. — In the house of a Jew. He had at first surprised pity, then goodwill, then entire confidence, for that is how it always happens: we count so strongly on our kindness, that we seldom hide our secrets from anybody on whom we have heaped benefits. How should there not be ingrates in the world, when we expose this man to the temptation of being

ungrateful with impunity? That is a just reflection which our Jew failed to make. He confided to the renegade that he could not conscientiously eat pork. You will see the advantage that a fertile wit knew how to get from such a confession. Some months passed, during which our renegade redoubled his attentions; when he believed his Jew thoroughly touched, thoroughly captivated, thoroughly convinced that he had no better friend among all the tribes of Israel ... now admire the circumspection of the man! He is in no hurry; he lets the pear ripen before he shakes the branch; too much haste might have ruined his design. It is because greatness of character usually results from the natural balance between several opposite qualities.

I. — Pray leave your reflections, and go straight on with your story.

He. — That is impossible. There are days when I cannot help reflecting; 'tis a malady that must be allowed to run its course. Where was I?

I. — At the intimacy that had been established between the Jew and the renegade.

He. — Then the pear was ripe.... But you are not listening; what are you dreaming about?

I. — I am thinking of the curious inequality in your tone, now so high, now so low.

He. — How can a man made of vices be one and the same?... He reaches his friend's house one night, with an air of violent perturbation, with broken accents, a face as pale as death, and trembling in every limb. "What is the matter with you?"— "We are ruined." "Ruined, how?"— "Ruined, I tell you, beyond all help."— "Explain."— "One moment, until I have recovered from my fright."— "Come, then, recover yourself," says the Jew.... "A traitor has informed against us before the Holy Inquisition, you as a Jew, me as a renegade, an infamous renegade...." Mark how the traitor does not blush to use the most odious expressions. It needs more courage than you

may suppose to call one's self by one's right name; you do not know what an effort it costs to come to that.

I. — No, I daresay not. But "the infamous renegade — —"

He. — He is false, but his falsity is adroit enough. The Jew takes fright, tears his beard, rolls on the ground, sees the officers at his door, sees himself clad in the *Sanbenito*, sees his *auto-da-fè* all made ready. "My friend," he cries, "my good, tender friend, my only friend, what is to be done?"

"What is to be done? Why show ourselves, affect the greatest security, go about our business just as we usually do. The procedure of the tribunal is secret but slow; we must take advantage of its delays to sell all you have. I will hire a boat, or I will have it hired by a third person — that will be best; in it we will deposit your fortune, for it is your fortune that they are most anxious to get at; and then we will go, you and I, and seek under another sky the freedom of serving our God, and following in security the law of Abraham and our own consciences. The important point in our present dangerous situation is to do nothing imprudent."

No sooner said than done. The vessel is hired, victualled, and manned, the Jew's fortune put on board; on the morrow, at dawn, they are to sail, they are free to sup gaily and to sleep in all security; on the morrow they escape their prosecutors. In the night, the renegade gets up, despoils the Jew of his portfolio, his purse, his jewels, goes on board, and sails away. And you think that this is all? Good: you are not awake to it. Now when they told me the story, I divined at once what I have not told you, in order to try your sagacity. You were quite right to be an honest man; you would never have made more than a fifth-rate scoundrel. Up to this point the renegade is only that; he is a contemptible rascal whom nobody would consent to resemble. The sublimity of his wickedness is this, that he was himself the informer against his good friend the Israelite, of whom the Inquisition took

hold when he awoke the next morning, and of whom a few days later they made a famous bonfire. And it was in this way that the renegade became the tranquil possessor of the fortune of the accursed descendant of those who crucified our Lord.

I. — I do not know which of the two is most horrible to me — the vileness of your renegade, or the tone in which you speak of it.

He. — And that is what I said: the atrocity of the action carries you beyond contempt, and hence my sincerity. I wished you to know to what a degree I excelled in my art, to extort from you the admission that I was at least original in my abasement, to rank me in your mind on the line of the great good-for-noughts, and to hail me henceforth — *Vivat Mascarillus, fourbum imperator*!

[Here the discussion is turned aside, by Rameau's pantomimic performance of a fugue, to various topics in music.[224]]

I. — How does it happen that with such fine tact, such great sensibility for the beauties of the musical art, you are so blind to the fine things of morality, so insensible to the charms of virtue?

He. — It must be because there is for the one a sense that I have not got, a fibre that has not been given to me, a slack string that you may play upon as much as you please, but it never vibrates. Or it may be because I have always lived with those who were good musicians but bad men, whence it has come to pass that my ear has grown very fine, and my heart has grown very deaf. And then there is something in race. The blood of my father and the blood of my uncle is the same blood; my blood is the same as that of my father; the paternal molecule was hard and obtuse, and that accursed first molecule has assimilated to itself all the rest.

I. — Do you love your child?

He. — Do I love it, the little savage! I dote on it.

I. — Will you not then seriously set to work to arrest in it the consequences of the accursed paternal molecule?

He. — I shall labour in vain, I fancy. If he is destined to grow into a good man, I shall not hurt him; but if the molecule meant him for a ne'er-do-well like his father, then all the pains that I might have taken to make a decent man of him would only be very hurtful to him, Education incessantly crossing the inclination of the molecule, he would be drawn as it were by two contrary forces, and would walk in zigzags along the path of life, as I see an infinity of other people doing, equally awkward in good and evil. These are what we call *espèces*, of all epithets the most to be dreaded, because it marks mediocrity and the very lowest degree of contempt. A great scoundrel is a great scoundrel, but he is not an *espèce*. Before the paternal molecule had got the upper hand, and had brought him to the perfect abjection at which I have arrived, it would take endless time, and he would lose his best years. I do not meddle at present; I let him come on. I examine him; he is already greedy, cunning, idle, lying, and a cheat; I'm much afraid that he is a chip of the old block.

I. — And you will make him a musician, so that the likeness may be exact?

He. — A musician! Sometimes I look at him and grind my teeth, saying: If thou wert ever to know a note of music, I believe I would wring thy neck.

I. — And why so, if you please?

He. — Music leads to nothing.

I. — It leads to everything.

He. — Yes, when people are first-rate. But who can promise himself that his child shall be first-rate. The odds are ten thousand to one that he will never be anything but a wretched scraper of catgut. Are you aware that it would perhaps be easier to find a child fit to govern a realm, fit to be a great king, than one fit for a great violin player.

I. — It seems to me that agreeable talents, even if they are mediocre, among a people who are without morals, and are lost in debauchery and luxury, get a man rapidly on in the path of fortune.

He. — No doubt, gold and gold; gold is everything, and all the rest without gold is nothing. So instead of cramming his head with fine maxims which he would have to forget, on pain of remaining a beggar all the days of his life, what I do is this: when I have a louis, which does not happen to me often, I plant myself in front of him, I pull the louis out of my pocket, I show it to him with signs of admiration, I raise my eyes to heaven, I kiss the louis before him, and to make him understand still better the importance of the sacred coin, I point to him with my finger all that he can get with it, a fine frock, a pretty cap, a rich cake; then I thrust the louis into my pocket, I walk proudly up and down, I raise the lappet of my waistcoat, I strike my fob; and in that way I make him see that it is the louis in it that gives me all this assurance.

I. — Nothing could be better. But suppose it were to come to pass that, being so profoundly penetrated by the value of the louis, he were one day....

He. — I understand you. One must close one's eyes to that; there is no moral principle without its own inconvenience. At the worst 'tis a bad quarter of an hour, and then all is over.

I. — Even after hearing views so wise and so bold, I persist in thinking that it would be good to make a musician of him. I know no other means of getting so rapidly near great people, of serving their vices better, or turning your own to more advantage.

He. — That is true; but I have plans for a speedier and surer success. Ah, if it were only a girl! But as we cannot do all that we should like, we must take what comes, and make the best of it, and not be such idiots as most fathers, who could literally do nothing worse, supposing them to have deliberately planned the misery of their children — namely, give the

education of Lacedæmon to a child who is destined to live in Paris. If the education is bad, the morals of my country are to blame for that, not I. Answer for it who may; I wish my son to be happy, or what is the same thing, rich, honoured, and powerful. I know something about the easiest ways of reaching this end, and I will teach them to him betimes. If you blame me, you sages, the multitude and success will acquit me. He will put money in his purse, I can tell you. If he has plenty of that, he will lack nothing else, not even your esteem and respect.

I. — You may be mistaken.

He. — Then perhaps he will do very well without it, like many other people.

[There was in all this a good deal of what passes through many people's minds, and much of the principle according to which they shape their own conduct; but they never talk about it. There, in short, is the most marked difference between my man and most of those about us. He avowed the vices that he had, and that others have; but he was no hypocrite. He was neither more nor less abominable than they; he was only more frank, and more consistent, and sometimes he was profound in the midst of his depravity. I trembled to think what his child might become under such a master. It is certain that after ideas of bringing-up, so strictly traced on the pattern of our manners, he must go far, unless prematurely stopped on the road.]

He. — Oh, fear nothing. The important point, the difficult point, to which a good father ought to attend before everything else, is not to give to his child vices that enrich, or comical tricks such as make him valuable to people of quality — all the world does that, if not on system as I do, at least by example and precept. The important thing is to impress on him the just proportion, the art of keeping out of disgrace and the arm of the law. There

are certain discords in the social harmony that you must know exactly how to place, to prepare, and to hold. Nothing so tame as a succession of perfect chords; there needs something that stimulates, that resolves the beam, and scatters its rays.

I. — Quite so; by your image you bring me back from morals to music, and I am very glad, for, to be quite frank with, you, I like you better as musician than as moralist.

He. — Yet, I am a mere subaltern in music, and a really superior figure in morals.

I. — I doubt that; but even if it were so, I am an honest man, and your principles are not mine.

He. — So much the worse for you. Ah, if I only had your talents!

I. — Never mind my talents; let us return to yours.

He. — If I could only express myself like you! But I have an infernally absurd jargon — half the language of men of the world and of letters, half of Billingsgate.

I. — Nay, I am a poor talker enough. I only know how to speak the truth, and that does not always answer, as you know.

He. — But it is not for speaking the truth — on the contrary, it is for skilful lying that I covet your gift. If I knew how to write, to cook up a book, to turn a dedicatory epistle, to intoxicate a fool as to his own merits, to insinuate myself into the good graces of women!

I. — And you do know all that a thousand times better than I. I should not be worthy to be so much as your pupil.

He. — How many great qualities lost, of which you do not know the price.

I. — I get the price that I ask.

He. — If that were true, you would not be wearing that common suit, that rough waistcoat, those worsted stockings, those thick shoes, that

ancient wig.

I. — I grant that; a man must be very maladroit not to be rich, if he sticks at nothing in order to become rich. But the odd thing is that there are people like me who do not look on riches as the most precious thing in the world; bizarre people, you know.

He. — Bizarre enough. A man is not born with such a twist as that. He takes the trouble to give it to himself, for it is not in nature.

I. — In the nature of man?

He. — No; for everything that lives, without exception, seeks its own wellbeing at the expense of any prey that is proper to its purpose; and I am perfectly sure that if I let my little savage grow up without saying a word to him on the matter, he would wish to be richly clad, sumptuously fed, cherished by men, loved by women, and to heap upon himself all the happiness of life.

I. — If your little savage were left to himself, let him only preserve all his imbecility, and add to the scanty reason of the child in the cradle the violent passions of a man of thirty — why he would strangle his father and dishonour his own mother.

He. — That proves the necessity of a good education, and who denies it? And what is a good education but one that leads to all sorts of enjoyments without danger and without inconvenience?

I. — I am not so far from your opinion, only let us keep clear of explanations.

He. — Why?

I. — Because I am afraid that we only agree in appearance, and that if we once begin to discuss what are the dangers and the inconveniences to avoid, we should cease to understand one another.

He. — What of that?

I. — Let us leave all this, I tell you; what I know about it I shall never get you to learn, and you will more easily teach me what I do not know, and you do know, in music. Let us talk about music, dear Rameau, and tell me how it has come about that with the faculty for feeling, retaining, and rendering the finest passages in the great masters, with the enthusiasm that they inspire in you, and that you transmit to others, you have done nothing that is worth....

Instead of answering me, he shrugged his shoulders, and pointing to the sky with his finger, he cried: The star! the star! When Nature made Leo, Vinci, Pergolese, Duni, she smiled. She put on a grave and imposing air in shaping my dear uncle Rameau, who for half a score years they will have called the great Rameau, and of whom very soon nobody will say a word. When she tricked up his nephew, she made a grimace, and a grimace, and again a grimace. [And as he said this, he put on all sorts of odd expressions: contempt, disdain, irony; and he seemed to be kneading between his fingers a piece of paste, and to be smiling at the ridiculous shapes that he gave it; that done, he flung the incongruous pagod[225] away from him, and said:] It was thus she made me, and flung me by the side of the other pagods, some with huge wrinkled paunches, and short necks, and great eyes projecting out of their heads, stamped with apoplexy; others with wry necks; some again with wizened faces, keen eyes, hooked noses. All were ready to split with laughing when they espied me, and I put my hands to my sides and split with laughter when I espied them, for fools and madmen tickle one another; they seek and attract one another. If when I got among them, I had not found ready-made the proverb about *the money of fools being the patrimony of people with wits*, they would have been indebted to me for it. I felt that nature had put my lawful inheritance into the purses of the pagods, and I devised a thousand means of recovering my rights.

I. — Yes, I know all about your thousand means; you have told me of them, and I have admired them vastly. But with so many resources, why not have tried that of a fine work?...

He. — When I am alone I take up my pen and intend to write; I bite my nails and rub my brow; your humble servant, good-bye, the god is absent. I had convinced myself that I had genius; at the end of the time I discover that I am a fool, a fool, and nothing but a fool. But how is one to feel, to think, to rise to heights, to paint in strong colours, while haunting with such creatures as those whom one must see if one is to live; in the midst of such talk as one has to make and to hear, and such idle gossip: "How charming the boulevard was to-day!" "Have you heard the little Marmotte? Her playing is ravishing." "Mr. So-and-so had the handsomest pair of grays in his carriage that you can possibly imagine." "The beautiful Mrs. So-and-so is beginning to fade; who at the age of five-and-forty would wear a headdress like that?" "Young Such-and-such is covered with diamonds, and she gets them cheap."

"You mean she gets them dear."

"No, I do not."

"Where did you see her?"

"At the play."

"The scene of despair was played as it had never been played before." "The Polichinelle of the Fair has a voice, but no delicacy, no soul." "Madame So-and-so has produced two at a birth; each father will have his own child...." And yet you suppose that this kind of thing, said and said again, and listened to every day of the week, sets the soul aglow and leads to mighty things.

I. — Nay, it were better to turn the key of one's garret, drink cold water, eat dry bread, and seek one's true self.

He. — Maybe, but I have not the courage. And then the idea of sacrificing one's happiness for the sake of a success that is doubtful! And the name that I bear? Rameau! It is not with talents as it is with nobility; nobility transmits itself, and increases in lustre by passing from grandfather to father, and from father to son, and from son to grandson, without the ancestor impressing a spark of merit on his descendant; the old stock ramifies into an enormous crop of fools; but what matter? It is not so with talents. Merely to obtain the renown of your father, you must be cleverer than he was; you must have inherited his fibre. The fibre has failed me, but the wrist is nimble, the fiddle-bow scrapes away, and the pot boils; if there is not glory, there is broth.

I. — If I were in your place, I would not take it for granted; I would try.... Whatever it be that a man applies himself to, nature meant him for it.

He. — She makes mighty blunders. For my part, I do not look down from heights, whence all seems confused and blurred, — the man who prunes a tree with his knife, all one with the caterpillar who devours its leaf; a couple of insects, each at his proper task. Do you, if you choose, perch yourself on the epicycle of the planet Mercury, and thence distribute creation, in imitation, of Réaumur; he, the classes of flies into seamstresses, surveyors, reapers; you, the human species into joiners, dancers, singers, tilers. That is your affair, and I will not meddle with it. I am in this world, and in this world I rest. But if it is in nature to have an appetite — for it is always to appetite that I come back, and to the sensation that is ever present to me — then I find that it is by no means consistent with good order not to have always something to eat. What a precious economy of things! Men who are over-crammed with everything under the sun, while others, who have a stomach just as importunate as they, a hunger that recurs as regularly as theirs, have not a bite. The worst is the constrained posture to which want pins us down. The needy man does not walk like anybody else; he jumps,

he crawls, he wriggles, he limps, he passes his whole life in taking and executing artificial postures.

I. — What are postures?

He. — Ask Noverre.[226] The world offers far more of them than his art can imitate.

I. — Ah, there are you too — to use your expression or Montaigne's — *perched on the epicycle of Mercury*, and eyeing the various pantomimes of the human race.

He. — No, no, I tell you; I'm too heavy to raise myself so high. No sojourn in the fogs for me. I look about me, and I assume my postures, or I amuse myself with the postures that I see others taking. I am an excellent pantomime as you shall judge.

[Then he set himself to smile, to imitate the admirer, the suppliant, the fawning complaisant; he expects a command, receives it, starts off like an arrow, returns, the order is executed, he reports what he has done; he is attentive to everything; he picks up something that has fallen; he places a pillow or a footstool; he holds a saucer; he brings a chair, opens a door, closes a window, draws the curtains, gazes on the master and mistress; he stands immovable, his arms hanging by his side, his legs exactly straight; he listens, he seeks to read their faces, and then he adds: — That is my pantomime, very much the same as that of all flatterers, courtiers, valets, and beggars.

The buffooneries of this man, the stories of the abbé Galiani, the extravagances of Rabelais, have sometimes thrown me into profound reveries. They are three stores whence I have provided myself with ridiculous masks that I place on the faces of the gravest personages, and I see Pantaloon in a prelate, a satyr in a president, a pig in a monk, an ostrich in a minister, a goose in his first clerk.]

I. — But according to your account, I said to my man, there are plenty of beggars in the world, and yet I know nobody who is not acquainted with some of the steps of your dance.

He. — You are right. In a whole kingdom there is only one man who walks, and that is the sovereign.

I. — The sovereign? There is something to be said on that. For do you suppose that one may not from time to time find even by the side of him, a dainty foot, a pretty neck, a bewitching nose, that makes him execute his pantomime. Whoever has need of another is indigent, and assumes a posture. The king postures before his mistress, and before God he treads his pantomimic measure. The minister dances the step of courtier, flatterer, valet, and beggar before his king. The crowd of the ambitious cut a hundred capers, each viler than the rest, before the minister. The abbé, with his bands and long cloak, postures at least once a week before the patron of livings. On my word, what you call the pantomime of beggars is only the whole huge bustle of the earth....

He. — But let us bethink ourselves what o'clock it is, for I must go to the opera.

I. — What is going on?

He. — Dauvergne's *Trocqueurs*. There are some tolerable things in the music; the only pity is that he has not been the first to say them. Among those dead, there are always some to dismay the living. What would you have? *Quisque suos patimur manes.* But it is half-past five, I hear the bell ringing my vespers. Good day, my philosopher; always the same, am I not?

I. — Alas, you are; worse luck.

He. — Only let me have that bad luck for forty years to come! Who laughs last has the best of the laugh.

THE END

ENDNOTES.

[1] *Œuv.*, v. 289.

[2] v. 295, 296.

[3] *Œuv.*, v. 342.

[4] Boethius.

[5] See, however, above, vol. i. p. 274.

[6] *Œuv.*, ii. 249.

[7] See Nordhoff's *Communistic Societies of the United States* (London: Murray, 1875), pp. 259-293. This grave and most instructive book shows how modifiable are some of those facts of existing human character which are vulgarly deemed to be ultimate and ineradicable.

[8] *Œuv.*, ii. 243.

[9] Hettner's *Literaturgeschichte*, i. 462.

[10] The *Eloge de Richardson* is in Diderot's Works, v. 212-227.

[11] The *belle âme* was the origin of the *schöne Seele* that has played such a part in German literature and life. The reader will find a history of the expression in an appendix to Dr. Erich Schmidt's study. *Richardson, Rousseau, und Goethe* (Jena, 1875).

[12] *La Religieuse. Œuv.*, v. 110.

[13] Sterne's Letters, May 23, 1765.

[14] Nov. 12, 1767.

[15] E.g. *Le Voyageur Sentimental* of Vernes (Grimm, *Corr. Lit.*, xiii. 227).

[16] Quoted in Rosenkranz, ii. 326.

[17] vi. 221, 222.

[18] *Essays*, iv. 303. (Ed. 1869.)

[19] *E.g.* Watelet's poem, *Sur l'Art de Peindre*, 1760; Le Mierre's *Sur la Peinture*, 1769; Marsy's *Pictura Carmen*, 1736. See Diderot's works, xiii. 17, etc.

[20] *Œuv.*, iii. 486. Guhrauer, ii. 15. Also Blümner's admirable edition of the *Laocöon*, p. 173.

[21] xiii. 33.

[22] Grimm, *Corr. Lit.*, iv. 136. In another place in the same work either Grimm or Diderot makes a remark about Batteux, which is worth remembering in our own age of official vindications of orthodoxy. The abbé had written a book about first causes. "I venture to observe moreover to M. l'abbé Batteux that when in this world a man has put on the dress of any sort of harlequin, red or black, with a pair of bands or a frill, he ought to give up once for all every kind of philosophic discussion, because it is impossible for him to speak according to his faith and his conscience; and a writer of bad faith is all the more odious, as nothing compelled him to break silence." *Ib.* vi. 120.

[23] *Lettres Familières*, i. 174. (Ed. 1869.)

[24] Dupaty's *Lettres sur l'Italie*, No. 40. In talking of Rome, he complains in a very Diderotian spirit of the want of *le beau moral*. "On ne trouve ici dans les mœurs ni des hommes privés ni des hommes publics, cette moralité, cette bienséance, dont les mœurs françoises sont pleines. *Le beau moral est absolument inconnu.* Or, c'est pour atteindre à ce beau moral dans tous les genres que la sensibilité est la plus tourmentée; qu'elle est en proie aux contentions de l'esprit, aux émulations de l'âme ... qu'elle pare avec tant de raffinement et de peine, les écrits, les discours, les passions, enfin toute la vie publique et privée."

[25] x. 514, *n.*

[26] xi. 241.

[27] Goncourt's *L'Art au 18ième Siècle*, i.

[28] Goncourt's *Art au 18ième Siècle*, i. 213.

[29] Taine's *Ancien Régime*, p. 186.

[30] "Si tous les tableaux de martyrs que nos grands peintres ont si sublimement peints, passaient à une postérité reculée, pour qui nous prendrait-elle? Pour des bêtes féroces ou des anthropophages." — Diderot's *Pensées sur la Peinture*.

[31] x. 143.

[32] x. 343.

[33] No. 260 of the French School.

[34] x. 151-156. Dr. Waagen pronounces this picture to be as truly an expression of *das Nationalfranzösiche* as Wilkie's paintings are of *das Englische*. See his *Kunstwerke und Künstler in Paris*, p. 675.

[35] x. 208.

[36] x. 177.

[37] xii. 8, 79.

[38] xi. 149.

[39] See Reynolds's Twelfth Discourse, p. 106.

[40] x. 102.

[41] xi. 296. For the Callirrhoë, see x. 397.

[42] x. 121.

[43] *Voyage en Italie*, 230. *Voyage en Espagne*, 330. See the same critic's *Abécédaire du Salon de 1861*.

[44] xi. 309.

[45] xi. 294.

[46] xi. 102.

[47] x. 342. He says elsewhere of Greuze (xviii. 247) that he is *un excellent artiste, mais une bien mauvaise téte*.

[48] Quoted in Diderot's *Œuv.*, v. 460, *n.*

[49] E.g. *Œuv.*, xi. 258.

[50] xi. 74.

[51] x. 115.

[52] x. 125.

[53] xi. 98-149.

[54] *E.g.* xi. 223.

[55] x. 481, 462.

[56] x. 467. For a more respectful view of the antique, and of Winckelmann's position, see *Salon de 1765*, x. 418.

[57] Diderot's *Versuch über die Malerei*. Goethe's *Werke*, xxv. 309, etc.

[58] And of course on occasion did actually find. See xi. 101. Sir Joshua Reynolds, who was too sincere a lover of his art not to be above mere patriotic prejudice, describes the condition of things. "I have heard painters acknowledge that they could do better without nature than with her, or, as they expressed themselves, it only put them out. Our neighbours, the French, are much in this practice of extempore invention, and their dexterity is such as even to excite admiration, if not envy; but how rarely can this praise be given to their finished pictures!" Twelfth Discourse, p. 105.

[59] x. 124, 125.

[60] *Œuv.*, x.

[61] It is to be observed also that he shows true perspicacity in connecting the difficulty of transforming a poetic into a pictorial description, with the kindred difficulty of translating a finished poem in one language into another language. See also xi. 107.

[62] Lessing appears to have been directly led to this by Aristotle. See Gotschlich's *Lessing's Aristotelische Studien*, p. 120.

[63] *Œuv.*, i. 382, 403.

[64] *Œuv.*, xi. 328.

[65] *Salon de 1761*; *Œuv.*, v. 140.

[66] *Memoirs of Princess Dashkoff* (vol. ii.). By Mrs. Bradford, an English companion and friend of the Princess. (London, 1840.) See Diderot's account of her, *Œuv.*, xvii. 487. Compare Horace Walpole's *Letters*, v. 266.

[67] *Œuv.*, xviii. 239.

[68] Grimm, *Cor. Lit.*, xv. 18. Diderot, xviii. 251.

[69] *Œuv.*, xix. 250.

[70] *Œuv.*, xviii. 365, 471.

[71] Ségur's *Mem.*, ii. 230.

[72] The Imperial Historical Society are publishing a *Recueil Général* of documents, many of which shed an interesting light on Catherine's intercourse with the men of letters. In the Archives of the House of Woronzow (especially vol. xii.), amid much of what for our purpose is chaff, are a few grains of what is interesting. M. Rambaud, the author of the learned work on the Greek Empire in the Tenth Century, gave interesting selections from these sources in two articles in the *Revue des deux Mondes* for February and April, 1877. Besides what is to be gathered from such well-known authorities as William Tooke, Ségur, Dashkoff, there are many interesting pages in the memoirs of that attractive and interesting person, the Prince de Ligne. The passages from English and French despatches I have taken from an anonymous but authentic work published at Berlin in 1858, *La Cour de la Russie il y a cent ans: 1725-83: extraits des dépêches des Ambassadeurs anglais et français*.

Catherine's own Memoirs, published in London in 1859 by Alexander Herzen, are perhaps too doubtful.

[73] *Mém. du Prince de Ligne*, p. 101.

[74] Ségur, 219.

[75] To the Prince de Ligne.

[76] Rambaud, p. 573.

[77] See M. Mouy's Introduction to her Correspondence with Stanislas.

[78] *Corresp. Complète de Mdme. du Deffand*, i. 115. (Ed. 1877.) June, 1767.

[79] November 1, 1773.

[80] November 1766.

[81] December 22, 1766.

[82] *Corresp.*, pp. 135, 144, etc.

[83] *Satire I. sur les caractères, etc. Œuv.*, vi. 313.

[84] *Œuv.*, xx. 58.

[85] Ségur, iii. 34.

[86] Mouy's *Corresp. du roi Stanislas*, p. 501.

[87] *Mémoire Historique*, printed in vol. i. of the new edition (1877) of the Correspondence of Grimm and Diderot, by M. Maurice Tourneux.

[88] D'Alembert au Roi de Prusse. Feb. 14, 1774.

[89] *Briefe aus seinen ausländischen Reisen*, iii. 217-233. (Leipsic, 1780 — a German translation from the Swedish.)

[90] xvii. 449.

[91] George Forster's *Ansichten vom Niederrhein*, etc. ii. 396 (1790).

[92] Jonckbloet's *Gesch. d. Niederland. Lit.* (German trans.) ii. 502, etc.

[93] *Œuv. Phil. de Fr. Hemsterhuys*, iii. 141. (Ed. Meyboom.)

[94] Forster, ii. 398. Galiani, *Corresp.* ii. 189.

[95] *Œuv.*, xix. 342.

[96] Dr. Katerkamp's *Denkwürdigkeiten aus dem Leben der Furstinn Amalie von Gallitzin*, p. 45.

[97] Barbier, vii. 137.

[98] *Œuv.*, xii. 301.

[99] *Ib.* ii. 267-274.

[100] *Ib.* ii. 795.

[101] *Œuv.*, ii. 795-798.

[102] See Jal's *Dict. Crit.*, p. 676. There is a comparison in *L'Esprit*, which we may assume to have been due to family reminiscence: "Like those Physicians who, in their jealousy of the discovery of the emetic, abused the credulity of a few prelates, to excommunicate a remedy of which the service is so prompt and so salutary," etc. — ii. 23.

[103] Hume, however, tells a story to the effect that Helvétius tried to dissuade Montesquieu from publishing his great book, as being altogether unworthy of his previous reputation.

[104] Barbier v. 57.

[105] Morellet, i. 71.

[106] Marmontel, ii, 116.

[107] Voyage à Bourbonne. *Œuv.*, xvii. 344.

[108] Burton's *Hume*, ii. 464.

[109] Morellet, i. 141. A peculiarly graphic account of Madame Helvétius in her later years is to be found in Mrs. Adam's *Letters*, quoted in Parton's *Life of Franklin*, ii. 429.

[110] *Œuv.*, xix. 187.

[111] *Corresp.*, iv. 119.

[112] Walpole's *Corresp.*, iv. 217.

[113] Burton, ii. 57.

[114] *Œuv. de Mdme. Roland*, i. 108.

[115] "To that book [*L'Esprit*], Mr. Bentham has often been heard to say, he stood indebted for no small portion of the zeal and ardour with which he advocated his happiness-producing theory. It was from thence he took encouragement ... it was there he learned to persevere," etc. etc. — *Deontology*, i. 296.

[116] *Disc.* ii. chap. xvii.

[117] *Ib.* ii. 6.

[118] *Disc.* ii. 17.

[119] *Ib.* ii. chap. xxiii.

[120] *Ib.* ii. 1, *note* (*b*).

[121] *Traité de Législation*, i. 243.

[122] *Disc.* ii. 5.

[123] *Disc.* ii. 15.

[124] See Diderot's truer version, *Œuv.*, ii. 482.

[125] *Disc.* iv. 13, etc.

[126] *Œuv.*, ii. 270.

[127] *Disc.* ii. 24.

[128] As Mr. Henry Sidgwick has put this:— "Even the indefatigable patience and inexhaustible ingenuity of Bentham will hardly succeed in defeating the sinister conspiracy of self-preferences. In fact, unless a little more sociality is allowed to an average human being, the problem of combining these egoists into an organisation for promoting their common happiness, is like the old task of making ropes of sand. The difficulty that Hobbes vainly tried to settle summarily by absolute despotism, is hardly to be overcome by the democratic artifices of his more inventive successor."

[129] *Disc.* ii. 13.

[130] *Disc.* ii. 24.

[131] *Disc.* iii.

[132] *Œuv.* ii. 271.

[133] *Ib.* ii. 275-456.

[134] *Political Justice*, bk. i. chap. iv.— "*The characters of men originate in their external circumstances.*"

[135] *Disc.* ii. 10.

[136] *Œuv.*, xvii. 329.

[137] *Ib.* ii. 398.

[138] *Corresp. de Galiani*, i. 142.

[139] *Wahrheit und Dichtung*, bk. xi.

[140] See the article *Dieu* in the *Dict. Philosophique*.

[141] Voltaire's *Corr.*, Nov. 1, 1770.

[142] July 27, 1770.

[143] Lange's *Gesch. d. Materialismus*, i. 369; where the author shows how entirely Voltaire failed to touch Holbach's position as to the meaning of Order in the universe.

[144] *Œuv.*, v. 296, 303, etc.

[145] *Nouvelle Héloise*, IV. xii.

[146] *Nouvelle Héloise*, V. v.

[147] See Lange, i. 85.

[148] *Syst. de la Nat.*, I. xvi.

[149] *Syst. de la Nat.*, I. xiv., xvi., etc. etc.

[150] *Dict. Phil.*, s. v. Dieu, § 4.

[151] Holbach confesses his obligation on this head to Toland's *Letters to Serena* (1704).

[152] Almost the very words of this passage are to be found in Diderot. See above, vol. i. p. 237.

[153] Ch. xi.

[154] This is not original in Holbach. Diderot's article on Suicide in the Encyclopædia (*Œuv.*, xvii. 235) contains the usual arguments of the Church against suicide, with some casuistic illustrations, but it also contains an account of Dr. Donne's vindication of Suicide, called *Bia-thanatos*, 1651, in which these remarks of Holbach occur verbatim. Hallam found Donne's book so dull and pedantic that he declares no one would be induced to kill himself by reading such a book unless he were threatened with another volume.

[155] Hume's suppressed Essay on Suicide (see the edition by Mr. Green and Mr. Grose, 1875, vol. ii. 405) is a much more exhaustive argument than Holbach's, though the language of the two pieces is

sometimes curiously alike. Rousseau in this, as in so many other moralities — marriage, for instance — was on the side of the Church, only allowing suicide where a man happens to be stricken by a painful and incurable disease. See the two famous letters in the *New Heloïsa*, Pt. iii. 21, 22.

156 Taine's *Ancien Régime*, p. 287.

157 The *Biographie Universelle*, followed by the Encyclopædia Britannica, tells a story of Raynal visiting the House of Commons; the Speaker, says the writer, learning that he was in the gallery, "suspended the discussion until a distinguished place had been found for the French philosopher." This must be set down as a myth. The journals have been searched, and there is no official confirmation of the statement, improbable enough on the face of it.

158 Morellet, i. 221.

159 *Walpole's Corresp.*, vi. 147 and 445.

160 Hédouin by name.

161 Ch. xxi.

162 *Works*, xii. 189 (edition of 1822).

163 Book v. § 31.

164 *Thiébault*, iii. 172; where there is a long and most disparaging account of Raynal, by no means incredible, though we must remember that a competent judge has pronounced Thiébault to be "stupid, incorrect, and the prey of stupidities."

165 Sénac de Meilhan, 123.

166 Book i. § 7. Robertson works out this reflection in his *Historical Disquisition concerning Ancient India*, iv. § 8.

167 *Voyage d'un Philosophe, etc.*; a work published in 1768, and in great vogue for some time, partly because it furnished material for the speculations of Raynal, Helvétius, and the rest. See *De l'Homme*, II. xiii., etc. Grimm, v. 450.

168 Book xvii.

[169] Jefferson, quoted in Parton's *Life of Franklin*, ii. 418.

[170] *Walpole's Letters*, v. 421.

[171] Book xv. of the *Esprit des Lois*.

[172] Book xi. § 30.

[173] Hamel's *Robespierre* i. 456-458.

[174] *Elémens de Physiologie*, *Œuv.*, ix. 428.

[175] *Corresp.*, ii. 180.

[176] *Œuv.*, i. 54

[177] Letter to Mdlle. Voland, Sept. 23, 1762. xix. 136, 137.

[178] The dedication of the *Règnes de Claude et de Néron* to Naigeon, iii. 9.

[179] Diderot's *Leben*, ii. 357.

[180] See Mr. Brewer's preface to Roger Bacon, p. 73.; Montaigne's chapter *Des Livres*, and the *Defense de Sénèque et de Plutarque.*; *Let. Pers.*, 33.

[181] *Essai sur le Mérite et la Vertu. Œuv.*, i. 118, *note*.

[182] The first edition (1778) was entitled *Essai sur la Vie de Sénèque le philosophe, sur ses écrits, et sur le règne de Claude et de Néron*. In the second edition (1782) this was changed into *Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron, et sur la vie et les écrits de Sénèque*.

[183] Above, vol. ii. chap. i.

[184] iii. 110, 111.

[185] Grimm, *Corr. Lit.*, xi. 77.

[186] *Œuv.*, iii. 57.

[187] Dec. 8, 1776.

[188] Métra's *Corresp. Secrète*, vi. 292.

[189] See Diderot's *Œuv.*, xix. 465, *note*.

[190] The *Biographie Universelle*, after giving 1738 as the date of Naigeon's birth, absurdly attributes to him the article on *Âme* in the Encyclopædia, which was published in 1752, when Naigeon was fourteen years old.

[191] *Memoirs of Sir Samuel Romilly*, i. 63, 179, etc.

[192] See above, vol. i. p. 362.

[193] *Petites Lettres sur de Grands Philosophes*, ii.

[194] *Œuv. de Palissot*, i. 445. iv. 244.

[195] *Le Satyrique*, iii. p. 84. *note*.

[196] Métra, vi. 128.

[197] See for abundant matter of the same kind, M. Rocquain's *L'Esprit Révolutionnaire avant la Révolution*, bk. x. pp. 382, 390, etc.

[198] Montesquieu more sensibly had given the Church not more than five hundred years to live. *Let. Pers.*, 117. One hundred and fifty of them have already passed.

[199] Grimm died in 1807, Holbach in 1789, Catherine in 1796, and Frederick in 1786.

[200] See *Œuv.*, xix. 317, 326.

[201] *Œuv.*, vi. 442, where Diderot gives a sketch of this interesting man.

[202] "Is it not possible that the virtuous and moderate proposal to strangle the last Jesuit in the bowels of the last Jansenist might do something towards reconciling matters?" — Voltaire to Helvétius, May 11, 1761.

[203] *Les Eleutheromanes, ou les Furieux de la Liberté. Œuv.*, ix. 16.

[204] It is a curious illustration of the carelessness with which the so-called negative school have been treated, that so conscientious a writer as M. Henri Martin (*Hist. de France*, xvi. 146) should have taxed Diderot, among other sinister maxims, with this, that "the public punishment of a king changes the spirit of a nation for ever." Now the words occur in a collection of observations on government, which Diderot wrote on the margin of his copy of Tacitus, and which are entitled *Principes de Politique des Souverains* (1775). Some of the most pungent maxims are obviously intended for irony on the military and Machiavellian policy of Frederick the Great, while others on the policy of the Roman emperors are shrewd and sagacious. The maxim from which M. Martin quotes is the 147th, and in it the sombre words of his quotation follow this:— "*Let the people never see royal blood flow for any cause whatever.* The public punishment of a king," etc.! See *Œuv.*, ii. 486.

[205] *Mém. sur la Vie et les Ouvrages de Diderot*, p. 412.

[206] Grimm, *Corr. Lit.*, xi. 120.

[207] As to the precise drift of Maupertuis's theme, see Lange, *Gesch. d. Materialismus*, i. 413, *n.* 37. Also Rosenkranz, i. 134.

[208] In 1765 Grimm describes the principle of Leibnitz and Maupertuis as "gaining on us on every side." — *Corr. Lit.*, iv. 186.

[209] Palissot, in the *Philosophers*, concocted some very strained satire on the too pompous opening of the *Interpretation of Nature*. Act I. sc. 2.

[210] Comte's *System of Positive Polity*, i. 380, etc. English translation, 1875.

[211] By F. Sclopis, quoted in M. Vian's *Hist. de Montesquieu*, p. 51.

[212] *Œuv.*, ii. 12, 13, § 6. See the same idea in the Encyclopædia, above, vol. i. pp. 225-227.

[213] *Œuv.*, ii.

[214] *Gesch. d. Materialismus*, i. 309, 310, etc.

[215] *Œuv.*, ii. 176.

[216] *Œuv.*, iii. 490.

[217] *Ib.* iii. 469-471.

[218] *Œuv.*, iii. 473.

[219] *Ib.* ii. 505-528.

[220] Above, vol. ii. p. 104.

[221] xix. 200.

[222] xviii. 94.

[223] xviii. pp. 113 and 100.

[224] Vol. v. pp. 457-468.

[225] These little china images of gods, with nodding heads, were then a fashionable toy in Paris.

[226] A famous dancing-master of the time.

Diderot: The Talker (1906) by Evelyn Beatrice Hall



From ‘The Friends of Voltaire’

SOME HUNDRED AND EIGHTY odd years ago, in a little town in France, a wild boy slipped out of his room at midnight, and crept downstairs in his stocking-feet with the wicked intent of running away to Paris. This time-honoured escapade was defeated by the appearance of Master Denis’s resolute father with the household keys in his hand. ‘Where are you going?’ says he. ‘To Paris, to join the Jesuits.’ ‘Certainly; I will take you there myself to-morrow.’ And Denis retires tamely and ignominiously to bed.



From an Engraving by Henriquez, after the Portrait by Vanloo.

The next morning the good old father (a master-cutler in the town of Langres) escorted his scapegrace to the capital, as he had desired, entered him at Harcourt College, stayed himself for a fortnight at a neighbouring inn to see that the boy adhered to his intentions; and then went home. The adventure was redeemed from the commonplace in that this scapegrace would fain have run away, not *from* school, but *to* it; and that he was acting under an influence much more powerful than the cheap, adventurous fiction which generally prompts such schemes. When he was twelve years old the

Jesuits had tonsured Denis's hot head, and no doubt designed all it contained for their service.

At the college Denis spent his time in learning a great deal for himself, and doing, with brilliant ease and the most complete good-nature, a great deal of work of his school-fellows. He was himself astoundingly clever and astoundingly careless. He learnt mathematics, which could not make him exact, Latin, and English. With that charming readiness to do the stupid boys' lessons for them (*blanchir les chiffons des autres*, the talent came to be called when he grew older), with his inimitable love of life, his jolly, happy-go-lucky disposition, his open hand and heart, and his merry face, this should surely have been the most popular schoolboy that ever lived.

One of his friends was Bernis — to be poet, Cardinal, and *protégé* of Madame de Pompadour — and the pair would dine together at six sous a head at a neighbouring restaurant.

The schooldays were all too short. The practical master-cutler at Langres soon intimated to Denis that it was time to choose a profession. But Denis declines to be a doctor, because he has no turn for murder; or a lawyer, because he has no taste for doing other people's business. In brief, he does not want to be anything. He wants to learn, to study, to look round him. But a shrewd old tradesman is not going to give, even if he could afford to give, any son of his the money to do that. Denis had at home a younger brother, who was to be a priest ('that cursed saint,' the graceless Denis called him hereafter), a sister, good and sensible like her father, and a mother, who was tender and foolish over her truant boy, after the fashion of mothers all the world over. Here were three mouths to feed. Denis loved his father with all the impetuous affection of his temperament. He was delighted when, some years later, he went back to Langres and a fellow-townsman grasped him by the arm saying: 'M. Diderot, you are a good man, but if you think you will ever be as good a man as your father, you are much mistaken.' But Diderot

had never the sort of affection that consists in doing one's utmost for the object of the affection. He preferred to be a care and a trouble to his family and to live by his wits, harum-scarum, merry, and poor. He chose that life, and abided by the choice for ten years.

Three times in that period the old servant of the family tramped all the way from Langres to Paris with little stores of money hidden in her dress for this dear, naughty scapegrace of a Master Denis; but except for this, he lived on his wits in the most literal sense of the term. He made catalogues and translations; he wrote sermons and thought himself well paid at fifty écus the homily; he became a tutor — until the pupil's stupidity bored him, when he threw up the situation and went hungry to bed. He once indeed so far commanded himself as to remain in this capacity for three months. Then he sought his employer; he could endure it no more. 'I am making men of your children, perhaps; but they are fast making a child of me. I am only too well off and comfortable in your house, but I must leave it.' And he left.

One Shrove Tuesday he fainted from hunger in his wretched lodgings, and was restored and fed by his landlady. He took a vow that day, and kept it, that, if he had anything to give, he would never refuse a man in need. By the next morning he was as light-hearted as usual again. A bright idea, even the recollection of a few apt lines from Horace, would always restore his cheerfulness. He enjoyed indeed all the blessings of a sanguine nature, and fell into all its faults. The facts that his father was paying his debts, that often he had to sponge on his friends for a dinner, or trick a tradesman for an advantage he could not buy, neither troubled him nor made him work. It is no doubt to his credit that he never stooped, as he might easily have done, to be the literary parasite of some great man, to prostitute his talents to praise and fawn on some ignoble patron. But though that gay, profligate existence has been often made to sound romantic on paper, it was squalid and shabby enough in reality, with that shabbiness which is of the soul.

In the year 1743, when Diderot was thirty years old, he must needs fall in love. He was lodging with a poor woman and her daughter who kept themselves by doing fine needlework. Anne Toinette Champion (Nanette, Diderot called her) was not only exquisitely fresh and pretty, but she was good, simple, and honest. To gain access to her Diderot stooped to one of the tricks to which his life had made him used. He pretended that he was going to enter a Jesuit seminary, and employed Nanette to make him the necessary outfit. His mouth of gold did the rest. No one, perhaps, who did not live with Diderot and hear him talk 'as never man talked,' who did not know him in the flesh and fall under the personal influence of his magnetic and all-compelling charm, will ever fully understand it. 'Utterly unclean, scandalous, shameless' as many honest and upright people knew him to be, he fascinated them all. Something indeed of that fascination still lingers about him, as the scent of a flower may cling to a coarse, stained parchment. Read the facts of his life, as briefly and coldly stated in some biographical dictionary, and most men will easily dismiss him as a great genius and a great scoundrel. Read the thousand anecdotes that have gathered about his name, of the love his contemporaries bore him, of his generosity, his glowing affections, his passionate pity for sorrow, and his hot zeal for humanity, and it is easy to understand not only the mighty part Diderot played in the great movement which prepared men for freedom and the French Revolution, but also his insistent claims on their love and forgiveness.

A little seamstress could not, in the nature of things, resist him long. The hopeful lover went to Langres to obtain his father's consent to his marriage, which was of course refused. At the date of his wedding, November 6, 1743, Denis had published scarcely anything, had no certain sources of income, and very few uncertain ones. He was, moreover, at first so jealous of his dearest Nanette that he made her give up her trade of needlework, as

it brought her too much into contact with the outer world. The pair lived on her mother's savings; and then Denis translated a history of Greece from the English, and kept the wolf from the door a little longer.

Poverty fell, as ever, more hardly on the wife than on the husband. The ever popular Diderot was often asked out to dine with his friends, and always went; while at home Nanette feasted on dry bread, to be sure that this fine lover of hers should be able to have his cup of coffee and his game of chess at the *café* of the Regency as usual. Of course Denis took advantage of her talent for self-sacrifice. His writings contain much sentimental pity, expressed in the most beautiful language, for the condition and the physical disadvantages of women; and he spoke of himself most comfortably as a good husband and father, and honestly believed that he was both. But he began to neglect his wife directly his first passion for her was spent. She was not perfect, it is true. Of a certain rigidity in her goodness, and a certain bourgeois narrowness in her view of life, she may be justly accused. But it remains undeniable that she was thrifty and unselfish at home, while her husband was profligate and self-indulgent abroad, that she saved and worked for her children, while he wrote fine pages on paternal devotion, and that he never gave her the consideration and forbearance he demanded *from* her as a matter of course. Before her first child was born the poor girl had lost her mother, and had no one in all the world to depend on but that most untrustworthy creature on earth, a genius of bad character.

In the year 1745 Denis sent her to Langres for a long visit to his parents, to effect if possible a reconciliation with them.

The man who called himself 'the apologist of strong passions,' who thought marriage 'a senseless vow,' and 'was always very near to the position that there is no such thing as an absolute rule of right and wrong,' would not be likely to be faithful. He was not faithful. There soon loomed

on the scene a Madame Puisieux (the wife of a barrister), aged about five-and-twenty, charming, accomplished, dissolute. Diderot plunged headlong into love with her, as he plunged headlong into everything. To be sure, she was abominably extravagant and always wanting money. To gratify her demands Diderot wrote, most characteristically, an 'Essay on Merit and Virtue,' and brought Merit and Virtue the sum he received in payment. But Madame's love of fine clothes was insatiable. Between a Good Friday and Easter Day her lover composed for her the 'Philosophical Thoughts,' which first made him famous, which were paid the compliment of burning, and for which his mistress received fifty louis.

The history of the inspiration of masterpieces would afford a peculiarly interesting insight into human nature. It may be set down to the credit of Madame Puisieux (history knows of nothing else to her credit) that her rapacity at least forced this incorrigible ne'er-do-weel upon his destiny, and first turned Diderot, the most delightful scamp in the capital, into Diderot the hard-working philosopher and man of genius.

Nanette came home presently, having earned the love and admiration of the little family at Langres, and put up with Madame Puisieux as best she could. Other children were born to her, and died; only one, little Angélique, survived. Of the quantity of Diderot's love for this child there is no doubt; it is only the quality that is questionable. Self-indulgent to himself, he was weakly indulgent to her. She was apt at learning, so, when they both felt inclined, he taught her music and history. Later, when she was ill, he wrote letters about her full of ardent affection; but he left her mother to nurse her and went off gaily to amuse himself with his friends, and then took great credit for having given 'orders which marked attention and interest' in her, before he went out and dined with Grimm under the trees in the Tuileries.

Of course Angélique loved the lively good-natured father much the better of the two. Of her mother the daughter herself said afterwards, with a

sad truth, that she would have had a happier life if she could have cared less for her husband.

However, Denis was working now, and working meant, or should mean, ease and competence.

The ‘Philosophical Thoughts’ had made men turn and look at him. True, their audacious freedom was not pleasing to the government; but what did a Diderot care for that? His ideas rolled off his pen as the words rolled off his tongue. ‘I do not compose, I am no author,’ he wrote once. ‘I read, or I converse. I ask questions, or I give answers.’ The lines should be placed as a motto over each of his works. That they are literally true accounts for all his defects as a writer, and for all his charm.

In 1749 he happened to be talking about a certain famous operation for cataract, and afterwards wrote down his reflections on it. To a man born blind, atheism, said Diderot, is surely a natural religion. He sent his ‘Letter on the Blind for the Use of Those Who See’ to the great chief of the party of which his ‘Philosophical Thoughts’ had proclaimed himself a member. Voltaire replied that, for his part, if he were blind, he should have recognised a great Intelligence who provided so many substitutes for sight; and the friendship between Arouet and Denis was started with a will.

On July 24, 1749, Diderot found himself a prisoner in the fortress of Vincennes. He was not wholly surprised. No literary man was astonished at being imprisoned in those days. Diderot was perfectly aware that since the publication of the ‘Philosophical Thoughts’ he had been suspect of the police; he was also aware that his ‘Letter on the Blind’ contained a sneer on the subject of a fine lady, the *chère amie* of d’Argenson, the War Minister. For company he had ‘Paradise Lost’ and his own buoyant temperament. He made a pen out of a toothpick, and ink out of the slate scraped from the side of his window, mixed with wine; and with characteristic good-nature wrote

down this simple recipe for writing materials on the wall of his cell for the benefit of future sufferers.

Better than all, he was the friend of Voltaire, and Voltaire's Madame du Châtelet was a near relative of the governor of Vincennes. After twenty-one days of wire-pulling, Socrates Diderot, as Madame du Châtelet called him, was removed, as the fruit of her efforts, from the fortress to the castle of Vincennes, put on parole, allowed the society of his wife and children, with pen, ink, and books to his heart's content. One day Madame Puisieux came to see him — in attire too magnificent to be entirely for the benefit of a poor dog of a prisoner like myself, thinks Denis. That night he climbed over the high wall of the *enceinte* of the castle, and finding her, as he had expected, amusing herself with another admirer at a *fête*, renounced her as easily and hotly as he had fallen in love with her. He had one far more famous visitor in Vincennes, Jean Jacques Rousseau. As they walked together in the wood of Vincennes, Denis, with his overrunning fecundity of idea, suggested to Jean Jacques, it is said, the matter for that essay, sometimes called the 'Essay against Civilisation,' which first made him famous.

When his imprisonment had lasted three months Diderot, at the angry urging of the booksellers of Paris, was released.

In 1745 one of those booksellers, Le Breton, had suggested to him 'the scheme of a book that should be all books.' Enterprising England had been first in the field. To Francis Bacon belongs the honour of having originated the idea of an Encyclopædia. Chambers, an Englishman, first worked out that idea. It was a French translation of Chambers that Le Breton took to Diderot, and it was Diderot who breathed upon it the breath of life.

That this knavish bookseller's choice should have fallen out of all men upon him, might have inclined even so whole-hearted a sceptic as Denis himself to believe in an Intelligence behind the world. He was hungry and poor, and *must* have work that would bring him bread. There were indeed

thousands of persons in that position; but out of those thousands there was only one with the hot, sanguine courage to undertake so risky a scheme, with the ‘fiery patience’ to work it in the face of overwhelming odds, and with the exuberant genius to make it the mighty masterpiece it became.

Diderot saw its possibilities at once. In another second, as it were, he saw all he could himself do, and all he could not do. He could write about most things. He could study the trades and industries of France, if it took him thirty years of labour, of which the mere thought would daunt most men; by giving their history he could glorify for ever those peaceful arts which make a nation truly great and happy. He could write on Gallantry, on Genius, on Libraries, on Anagrams. For his fertile spirit scarcely any subject was too great or too small. Against intolerance he could bring to bear ‘the concentrated energy of a profound conviction.’ Religion itself he could attack in so far as it interfered with men’s liberty; and miracle he must attack, because, in the words of Voltaire, ‘Men will not cease to be persecutors till they have ceased to be absurd.’ If he had, just to appease the authorities, and to give the book a chance of a hearing, to truckle here and there to prejudice and superstition, well, Diderot could lie as heartily and as cheerfully as he did all things.

But the inexact schoolboy of Harcourt College was no mathematician, and knew his limitations. With the freemasonry of genius he saw in a single flashing glance that d’Alembert was the man to share with him the parentage of this wonderful child. He stormed the calm savant in his attic above the glazier’s shop, overwhelmed, prayed, pressed, bewitched him, and with ‘his soul in his eyes and his lips’ woke in d’Alembert’s quiet breast an enthusiasm which was at least some reflex of his own.

For three years the two worked night and day at the preliminaries of their scheme. In 1750 Diderot poured out, with the warmth and glow of a woman in love, the Prospectus and Plan of his work. The overwhelmingness of his

enthusiasm had forced a privilege for it from the authorities. Also in 1750 appeared d'Alembert's Preface, and the first volume was launched on the world.

From this time until 1765 the history of Diderot and of the Encyclopædia is the same thing. For fifteen years he worked at it unremittingly through storm and sunshine. The idea possessed and dominated him. In a garret on the fifth floor in his lodging in the Rue Taranne, wrapped in an old dressing-gown, with wild hair, bare neck, and bent back, the message he must deliver through the Encyclopædia bubbled into his heart and went straight from his heart to his pen.

'This thing will surely produce a great revolution in the human mind,' he said of it in passionate exultation: 'We shall have served humanity.' For this Diderot, who disbelieved so loudly and truculently in God, believed hopefully in the improvement of human kind, and had for the race so vast and so generous a pity that he sacrificed to it the coarse pleasures his coarse nature loved, his time, his peace, his worldly advancement, his safety, and his friend.

In 1752 a Royal Edict of matchless imbecility suppressed the first two volumes of the book, at the same time begging its promoters to continue to bring out others! Every year a volume appeared until 1757. The success of the thing was prodigious, and with reason, for it said what, so far, men had only dared to think. It gave the history, quite innocently, of the taxes — of *gabelle*, of *taille*, of *corvée* — and they stood 'damned to everlasting fame;' it showed the infamous abuses of the game-laws; it manifested the miracles of science. As by a magnet the genius of Diderot had drawn to him, as contributors, all the genius of France; while always at his side, co-editing, restraining his imprudence, yet working as he worked himself, was d'Alembert.

And then, in 1759, came the great suspension. D'Alembert had written his famous article 'Geneva,' and that mad emotionalist, Jean Jacques Rousseau, in the most famous treachery in the history of literature, turned on the philosophic party in his Letter to d'Alembert 'On Plays.' The authorities of France united with insulted Calvinism and with Rousseau, and declared the Encyclopædia accursed and forbidden. That would have been bad enough; but there was yet one thing worse. Beaten down by storm and insult, d'Alembert fell back from the fray and left Diderot to fight the battle alone.

He started up in a second, raging and cursing, and went out with his life in his hand. Seizing his pen, he slashed, hewed, hacked, with that reckless weapon on every side. Vincennes and the Bastille loomed ominously; he was never sure one day, says his daughter, of being allowed to continue the next; but he went on. The authorities might burn, but they could not destroy; they might prohibit, but they could not daunt a Diderot.

In 1764, despite galleys and bonfires, kings, ministers, and *lettres de cachet*, the last ten volumes were ready to appear in a single issue and to crown his life's labour, when fate struck him a last crushing blow. When the manuscript of the articles had been burnt he discovered that the false Le Breton, fearing for his own safety, had cut out all such passages as he thought might endanger it; and had thus mutilated and ruined the ten volumes past recall.

Diderot burst, literally, into tears of rage. Despair and frenzy seized him. Was this to be the end? Not while he had breath in his body! He attacked Le Breton with an unclean fury not often matched, and in 1765 the volumes appeared, as whole as his talent and energy could make them. It was Diderot who said that if he must choose between Racine, bad husband, father, and friend, but sublime poet; and Racine, good husband, father, and friend, but dull ordinary man, he would choose the first. 'Of the wicked

Racine, what remains? Nothing. Of Racine, the man of genius? The work is eternal.' When one considers his Herculean labours for the Encyclopædia, one is almost tempted to judge him as he judged Racine.

All the time, too, he was busy in many other ways. There has surely never been such a good-natured man of letters. The study door in the attic was open not only to all his friends, but to all the Grub Street vagrants and parasites of Paris. Diderot purified his friend d'Holbach's German-French and profusely helped his dearest Grimm in the 'Literary Correspondence;' he corrected proofs for Helvétius, Raynal, and Galiani, gave lessons in metaphysics to a German princess, and was, for himself, not only an encyclopædist, but a novelist, an art-critic, and a playwright. He also wrote dedicatory epistles for needy musicians, 'reconciled brothers, settled lawsuits, solicited pensions.' He planned a comedy for an unsuccessful dramatic author, and, in roars of laughter, indited an advertisement of a hair-wash to oblige an illiterate hairdresser. The story has been told often, but still bears telling afresh, of the young man who came to him with a personal satire against Diderot himself. 'I thought,' says the satirist, 'you would give me a few crowns to suppress it.' 'I can do better for you than that,' says Diderot, not in the least annoyed. 'Dedicate it to the brother of the Duke of Orleans, who hates me; take it to him and he will give you assistance.' 'But I do not know the Prince.' 'Sit down, and I will write the dedication for you.' He did, and so ably, that the satirist obtained a handsome sum.

Another day he composed for the benefit of a woman, who had been deserted by the Duc de la Vrillière, a most touching appeal to the Duke's feelings. 'While I lived in the light of your love, I did not ask your pity. But of all your passion there only remains to me your portrait — and that I must sell to-morrow for bread.' The Duke sent her fifty louis.

It is hardly necessary to say that Diderot's friends availed themselves as freely of his purse as of his brains. In return for his mighty expenditure of

time, talent, and energy for the Encyclopædia he never received more than the princely sum of one hundred and thirty pounds a year. As he was the sort of person who always took a carriage if he wanted one, who had a pretty taste in miniatures and *objets d'art* which he found it positively imperative to gratify, as he loved high play and always lost — as, in brief, he could never deny himself or anybody else anything — it was physically impossible he should ever be solvent.

One graceless hanger-on turned back as he was leaving him one day. 'M. Diderot, do you know any natural history?' 'Well,' says Diderot, 'enough to tell a pigeon from a humming-bird.' 'Have you ever heard of the *Formica leo*? It is a very busy little creature; it burrows a hole in the earth like a funnel, covers the surface with a fine sand, attracts a number of stupid insects to it, takes them, sucks them dry, and says, "M. Diderot, I have the honour to wish you a very good morning."' It may be said of Diderot that he could love, but not respect; and that is the inevitable attitude one takes towards himself.

In 1755, during his work at the Encyclopædia and for those innumerable idle persons who had much better have worked for themselves, poor Nanette went on a second fatal visit to Langres and gave her husband the opportunity of falling in love with Mademoiselle Volland, and starting a memorable correspondence.

Sophie Volland was a rather elderly young lady, with spectacles, and a good deal of real cleverness and erudition. Whether Diderot, who was now a man of forty-two, was ever literally in love with her, or whether he was 'less than lover but more than friend,' remains uncertain. His letters to her are warmly interesting, frank, natural, spontaneous, with many passages of exquisite beauty and thoughtfulness. There is but one fault — that fatal fault without which Diderot would not have been Diderot at all but some loftier man — his irrepressible indecency.

He had much to tell Mademoiselle. The words seem to trip over each other in his anxiety to show her all he had done and felt. He was now famous. The Encyclopædia had thrown open to him, cutler's son though he was, the doors of the *salons*; a great quarrel he had with Eousseau in 1757 — the dingy details of which there is neither interest nor profit in recalling — made him the talk of the *cafés*.

But this loud, explosive Denis was scarcely a social light. He said himself that he only liked company in which he could say anything. And what Diderot meant by *anything* was considered indecorous even in that freest of all free-spoken ages. Good old Madame Geoffrin lost her patience with him, not only for his licence, but for talking so movingly about duty and neglecting all his own. *She* was not going to ignore his Mademoiselle Volland. She treated him 'like a beast,' he said, and advised his wife to do the same. As for Madame Necker— 'qui raffole de moi,' said the complacent Denis himself — she too 'judged great men by their conduct and not by their talents,' which was very awkward indeed for a Diderot.

There was a third house where he visited much more often and got on much better; but that was not because Madame d'Épinay was its mistress, but because Grimm was its presiding genius. His friendship with the cool German had a sentimentality and a demonstrativeness which Englishmen find hard to forgive, but which were sincere enough not the less. Grimm took complete control of his impulsive, generous colleague. Because Grimm bade him, Denis began in 1759 writing his 'Salons,' or criticisms on pictures, and became 'the first critic in France who made criticism eloquent;' while, when Grimm was away, almost all the work of the 'Literary Correspondence' fell on Diderot's too good-natured shoulders. When his dearest friend was not there, Diderot's steps turned much less often towards Madame d'Épinay's house.

In 1759 he first spent an autumn at the only place at which he was perfectly at home, and where he soon became a regular visitor.

Baron d'Holbach was first of all 'an atheist, and not ashamed;' but he was also very rich, very liberal, very hospitable, with a charming country house at Grandval, near Charenton, where he entertained the free-thinkers of all nations, and where his table was equally celebrated for its cook and its conversation. The former was so good that Denis was always over-eating himself; and the latter was, in a moral sense, so bad that he enjoyed it to the utmost.

The Grandval household was fettered by none of the tiresome rules which are apt to make visiting, when one has passed the easily adaptable season of youth, a hazardous experiment. The hostess 'fulfilled no duties and exacted none.' The visitors were as free as in their own homes. Diderot would get up at six, take a cup of tea, fling open the windows to admit the air and sunshine, and then fall to work. At two came dinner. The house was always full of people who met now for the first time. In that free style, glowing with life and colour, Diderot recorded to Mademoiselle Volland the Rabelaisian conversation which made these dinners so long, and, to him, so delightful. He reported to her verbatim the amazing liberty of speech which distinguished them, just as he reported to her in minutest detail the indigestions for which the too excellent cook was responsible.

The unbridled talk of d'Holbach's mother-in-law continually set the table in a roar. Diderot himself was at his best — full of *bonhomie* and *joie-de-vivre* — laughing one minute and crying the next, warm in generous pity for sorrow, quick to be irritated or appeased, pouring out torrents of splendid ideas and then of grossest ribaldry, his mouth speaking always from the fulness of his heart, utterly indiscreet, brilliant, ingenuous, delightful; an orator 'drunk with the exuberance of his own verbosity,' who could argue that black was white, and then that white was black again, and whose

seduction and danger lay in the fact that he always fully believed both impossibilities himself. No subject that was started found him cool or neutral. ‘He is too hot an oven,’ said Voltaire; ‘everything gets burnt in him.’

When the dinner was over he would thrust his arm through his host’s and walk in the garden with him. He at least did his best to imbue the dogmatic atheism of d’Holbach with luxuriance and warmth. At seven they came back to the house, and supper was followed by picquet and by talk till they went to bed.

Among many other visitors whom Diderot met while he was what he called ‘veuf’ at Grandval were at least four Englishmen — Sterne, Wilkes, Garrick, and Hume.

Diderot has been well called the most English of the Frenchmen of the eighteenth century. He began his literary career by making translations from our language. In a passion of admiration he had fallen at the feet of the ‘divine Richardson,’ and imitated ‘Pamela’ in a very bad novel of his own, ‘The Nun;’ in another, ‘Jacques, the Fatalist,’ he tried to accustom France to romance in the style of Sterne. He had taught his fellow-citizens, he said, to read and to esteem Bacon. He was familiar with the works of Pope, Chaucer, Tillotson, and Locke; and he has left a noble and famous criticism upon Shakespeare: ‘He is like the St. Christopher of Notre-Dame, an unshapen Colossus, rudely carven, but beneath whose legs we can all walk without our brows touching him.’

To Garrick, Diderot paid exaggerated homage, and went into raptures over the wonderful play of his face. He admired Wilkes’s morals as well as his mind, and in 1768 wrote him a flattering letter. As for Hume, he liked the delightful Diderot better than any other philosopher he met in France. It is Diderot who tells the story of Hume saying at d’Holbach’s table, ‘I do not believe there is such a thing as an atheist; I have never seen one,’ and of

d'Holbach's replying, 'Then you have been a little unfortunate; you are sitting now with seventeen.' Sterne, whose 'Tristram Shandy' was delighting France in general and Diderot in particular when its author was at Grandval, on his return home sent Denis English books.

In 1761 Diderot produced a play. 'The Father of the Family' is, it must be confessed, a sad bore with his lachrymose moralities; but he is exhilarating compared to 'The Natural Son,' Diderot's second play, which was acted in 1771. The universal Denis was no playwright.

In 1772 he published the ten volumes of plates which he had laboriously prepared to supplement the text of the Encyclopædia; and in May 1773, when he was sixty years old, he visited Catherine the Great.

He had had relations with her for some years. One fine day, in 1765, it had suddenly occurred to him that his dearest Angélique, over whom he had poured such streams of paternal sentiment, would have positively no *dot*. Her fond, improvident father had, of course, never attempted to save anything for her, and, if he knew his own disposition, must have known too he never would save anything. The only thing he had of value in the world, besides his head, was his library. Catherine the Great was a magnificent patron of letters; and Diderot was her especial *protégé*. He would sell his books to her! She delightedly accepted the offer. She gave him for them a sum equal to about seven hundred pounds, and appointed him her librarian at a salary of a thousand livres a year, fifty years' payment being made in advance.

For the first time in his history Diderot found himself rich. When a patron so munificent asked him to visit her, how could he decline? All the Encyclopædists were her warm admirers; she herself used to say modestly that Voltaire had made her the fashion. Denis hated long journeys and loved Paris, but go he must. He left France on May 10, 1773. He stopped at The

Hague — where he characteristically admired the beauty of the women, and the turbot — and at last arrived at St. Petersburg.

For a monarch who complained that she might have been the head of Medusa — everyone turned to stone when she entered the room — Diderot must have been a singularly refreshing guest. It was one of the most charming traits in his character that he respected persons no more than a child does, or a dog. All etiquette fled before his breezy, impulsive personality. The very clothes he arrived in were so shabby, her Majesty had to present him immediately with a court suit. He was with her every afternoon. He said what he liked, and as much as he liked, which was a very great deal. In the heat and excitement of his arguments he would hammer the Imperial knees black and blue, till the Empress had to put a table in front of her for safety. If he ever did recollect her august position, '*Allons!*' she would cry; 'between men everything is permissible.' He evolved the most magnificent, impossible schemes for the government of her empire — which would have upset it in a week if she had tried them, said she. During his stay, his dearest Grimm was also a guest. In March 1774, Denis left; and by the time he reached Paris again, was persuaded that he had enjoyed himself very much indeed.

Four years later, in 1778, he first saw in the flesh the great elder brother of his order, the master-worker in the temple slowly lifting its gorgeous towers towards the light — Voltaire. They had not always agreed on paper: their goal had been the same, but not the road to it. 'But we are not so far apart,' says old Voltaire; 'we only want a conversation to understand each other.' Accordingly, when he came on his last triumph to the capital, Diderot went to see him in the Villettes' house on what is now the Quai Voltaire. Few details of their interviews have been preserved; but it is said that they discussed Shakespeare, and that when Diderot left, Voltaire said of him: 'He is clever, but he lacks one very necessary talent — that of

dialogue.' On his part, Diderot compared Voltaire to a haunted castle falling into ruins— 'but one can easily see it is still inhabited by a magician.'

Voltaire died. Diderot was himself growing old; he had acquired, he thought in Russia, the seeds of a lung disease. Angélique married a M. de Vandeul, on the strength of the *dot* provided by the sale of the library. Madame Diderot, poor soul, had become not a little worried and embittered. It is the careless who make the care-worn, and Diderot was almost to the last the engaging, light-hearted scamp whose troubles are always flung on to some patient scapegoat.

In 1783, or 1784, the death of Mademoiselle Volland gave him a real grief. Twenty years before he had written to her with an exquisite eloquence of the calm and gentle approach of the great rest, Death: 'One longs for the end of life as, after hard toil, one longs for the end of the day.' He proved in himself the truth of his own words. He had not even a hope of the immortality of the soul; but he had worked hard, the evening was come, and he was weary. He was still working — writing the 'Life of Seneca.' He was still his all too lovable, spontaneous self, talking with that marvellous inspiration of which the best of his books can convey little idea.

A fortnight before he died he moved into a new home, given him by Catherine the Great, in the Rue Richelieu, opposite the birthplace of Molière and almost next door to the house where Voltaire had lived with Madame du Châtelet, and after her death. The *curé* of Saint-Sulpice came to see him, and suggested that a retractation of his sceptical opinions would produce good effect. 'I dare say it would,' said Denis, 'but it would be a most impudent lie.' In his last conversation Madame de Vandeul records that she heard him say: 'The first step towards philosophy is unbelief.'

The end came very suddenly. On the last day of July 1784, he was supping with his wife and daughter, and at dessert took an apricot. Nanette gently remonstrated. 'Mais que diable de mal veux-tu que cela me fasse?'

he cried. They were his last words and perfectly characteristic. He died as he sat, a few minutes later.

If to be great means to be good, then Denis Diderot was a little man. But if to be great means to do great things in the teeth of great obstacles, then none can refuse him a place in the temple of the Immortals.

His fiction, taken from rottenness, has returned to it, and is justly dead. His plays were damned on their appearance. His moving criticisms on art and the drama, his satirical dialogue, ‘Rameau’s Nephew’ — nearly all the printed talk of this most matchless of all talkers — are rarely read. His letters to Mademoiselle Volland will last so long as the proper study of mankind is man. But it is as the father of the Encyclopædia that Denis Diderot merits eternal recognition. Guilty as he was in almost every relation of life towards the individual, for mankind, in the teeth of danger and of infidelity, at the ill-paid sacrifice of the best years of his exuberant life, he produced that book which first levelled a free path to knowledge and enfranchised the soul of his generation.

Denis Diderot (1911) by John Morley

From '1911 Encyclopædia Britannica', Volume 8

DENIS DIDEROT (1713–1784), French man of letters and encyclopaedist, was born at Langres on the 5th of October 1713. He was educated by the Jesuits, like most of those who afterwards became the bitterest enemies of Catholicism; and, when his education was at an end, he vexed his brave and worthy father's heart by turning away from respectable callings, like law or medicine, and throwing himself into the vagabond life of a bookseller's hack in Paris. An imprudent marriage (1743) did not better his position. His wife, Anne Toinette Champion, was a devout Catholic, but her piety did not restrain a narrow and fretful temper, and Diderot's domestic life was irregular and unhappy. He sought consolation for chagrins at home in attachments abroad, first with a Madame Puisieux, a fifth-rate female scribbler, and then with Sophie Voland, to whom he was constant for the rest of her life. His letters to her are among the most graphic of all the pictures that we have of the daily life of the philosophic circle in Paris. An interesting contrast may be made between the Bohemianism of the famous English literary set who supped at the Turk's Head with the Tory Johnson and the Conservative Burke for their oracles, and the Bohemianism of the French set who about the same time dined once a week at the baron D'Holbach's, to listen to the wild sallies and the inspiring declamations of Diderot. For Diderot was not a great writer; he stands out as a fertile, suggestive and daring thinker, and a prodigious and most eloquent talker.

Diderot's earliest writings were of as little importance as Goldsmith's *Enquiry into the State of Polite Learning* or Burke's *Abridgement of English History*. He earned 100 crowns by translating Stanyan's *History of Greece*

(1743); with two colleagues he produced a translation of James's *Dictionary of Medicine* (1746–1748) and about the same date he published a free rendering of Shaftesbury's *Inquiry Concerning Virtue and Merit* (1745), with some original notes of his own. With strange and characteristic versatility, he turned from ethical speculation to the composition of a volume of stories, the *Bijoux indiscrets* (1748), gross without liveliness, and impure without wit. In later years he repented of this shameless work, just as Boccaccio is said in the day of his grey hairs to have thought of the sprightliness of the *Decameron* with strong remorse. From tales Diderot went back to the more congenial region of philosophy. Between the morning of Good Friday and the evening of Easter Monday he wrote the *Pensées philosophiques* (1746), and he presently added to this a short complementary essay on the sufficiency of natural religion. The gist of these performances is to press the ordinary rationalistic objections to a supernatural revelation; but though Diderot did not at this time pass out into the wilderness beyond natural religion, yet there are signs that he accepted that less as a positive doctrine, resting on grounds of its own, than as a convenient point of attack against Christianity. In 1747 he wrote the *Promenade du sceptique*, a rather poor allegory — pointing first to the extravagances of Catholicism; second, to the vanity of the pleasures of that world which is the rival of the church; and third, to the desperate and unfathomable uncertainty of the philosophy which professes to be so high above both church and world.

Diderot's next piece was what first introduced him to the world as an original thinker, his famous *Lettre sur les aveugles* (1749). The immediate object of this short but pithy writing was to show the dependence of men's ideas on their five senses. It considers the case of the intellect deprived of the aid of one of the senses; and in a second piece, published afterwards, Diderot considered the case of a similar deprivation in the deaf and dumb.

The *Lettre sur les sourds et muets*, however, is substantially a digressive examination of some points in aesthetics. The philosophic significance of the two essays is in the advance they make towards the principle of Relativity. But what interested the militant philosophers of that day was an episodic application of the principle of relativity to the master-conception of God. What makes the *Lettre sur les aveugles* interesting is its presentation, in a distinct though undigested form, of the modern theory of variability, and of survival by superior adaptation. It is worth noticing, too, as an illustration of the comprehensive freedom with which Diderot felt his way round any subject that he approached, that in this theoretic essay he suggests the possibility of teaching the blind to read through the sense of touch. If the *Lettre sur les aveugles* introduced Diderot into the worshipful company of the philosophers, it also introduced him to the penalties of philosophy. His speculation was too hardy for the authorities, and he was thrown into the prison of Vincennes. Here he remained for three months; then he was released, to enter upon the gigantic undertaking of his life.

The bookseller Lebreton had applied to him with a project for the publication of a translation into French of Ephraim Chambers's *Cyclopaedia*, undertaken in the first instance by an Englishman, John Mills, and a German, Gottfried Sellius (for particulars see Encyclopaedia). Diderot accepted the proposal, but in his busy and pregnant intelligence the scheme became transformed. Instead of a mere reproduction of Chambers, he persuaded the bookseller to enter upon a new work, which should collect under one roof all the active writers, all the new ideas, all the new knowledge, that were then moving the cultivated class to its depths, but still were comparatively ineffectual by reason of their dispersion. His enthusiasm infected the publishers; they collected a sufficient capital for a vaster enterprise than they had at first planned; D'Alembert was persuaded to become Diderot's colleague; the requisite permission was procured from

the government; in 1750 an elaborate prospectus announced the project to a delighted public; and in 1751 the first volume was given to the world. The last of the letterpress was issued in 1765, but it was 1772 before the subscribers received the final volumes of the plates. These twenty years were to Diderot years not merely of incessant drudgery, but of harassing persecution, of sufferings from the cabals of enemies, and of injury from the desertion of friends. The ecclesiastical party detested the *Encyclopaedia*, in which they saw a rising stronghold for their philosophic enemies. By 1757 they could endure the sight no longer. The subscribers had grown from 2000 to 4000, and this was a right measure of the growth of the work in popular influence and power. To any one who turns over the pages of these redoubtable volumes now, it seems surprising that their doctrines should have stirred such portentous alarm. There is no atheism, no overt attack on any of the cardinal mysteries of the faith, no direct denunciation even of the notorious abuses of the church. Yet we feel that the atmosphere of the book may well have been displeasing to authorities who had not yet learnt to encounter the modern spirit on equal terms. The *Encyclopaedia* takes for granted the justice of religious tolerance and speculative freedom. It asserts in distinct tones the democratic doctrine that it is the common people in a nation whose lot ought to be the main concern of the nation's government. From beginning to end it is one unbroken process of exaltation of scientific knowledge on the one hand, and pacific industry on the other. All these things were odious to the old governing classes of France; their spirit was absolutist, ecclesiastical and military. Perhaps the most alarming thought of all was the current belief that the *Encyclopaedia* was the work of an organized band of conspirators against society, and that a pestilent doctrine was now made truly formidable by the confederation of its preachers into an open league. When the seventh volume appeared, it contained an article on "Geneva," written by D'Alembert. The writer contrived a panegyric on the

pastors of Geneva, of which every word was a stinging reproach to the abbés and prelates of Versailles. At the same moment Helvétius's book, *L'Esprit*, appeared, and gave a still more profound and, let us add, a more reasonable shock to the ecclesiastical party. Authority could brook no more, and in 1759 the *Encyclopaedia* was formally suppressed.

The decree, however, did not arrest the continuance of the work. The connivance of the authorities at the breach of their own official orders was common in those times of distracted government. The work went on, but with its difficulties increased by the necessity of being clandestine. And a worse thing than troublesome interference by the police now befell Diderot. D'Alembert, wearied of shifts and indignities, withdrew from the enterprise. Other powerful colleagues, Turgot among them, declined to contribute further to a book which had acquired an evil fame. Diderot was left to bring the task to an end as he best could. For seven years he laboured like a slave at the oar. He wrote several hundred articles, some of them very slight, but many of them most laborious, comprehensive and ample. He wore out his eyesight in correcting proofs, and he wearied his soul in bringing the manuscript of less competent contributors into decent shape. He spent his days in the workshops, mastering the processes of manufactures, and his nights in reproducing on paper what he had learnt during the day. And he was incessantly harassed all the time by alarms of a descent from the police. At the last moment, when his immense work was just drawing to an end, he encountered one last and crowning mortification: he discovered that the bookseller, fearing the displeasure of the government, had struck out from the proof sheets, after they had left Diderot's hands, all passages that he chose to think too hardy. The monument to which Diderot had given the labour of twenty long and oppressive years was irreparably mutilated and defaced. It is calculated that the average annual salary received by Diderot

for his share in the *Encyclopaedia* was about £120 sterling. “And then to think,” said Voltaire, “that an army contractor makes £800 in a day!”

Although the *Encyclopaedia* was Diderot’s monumental work, he is the author of a shower of dispersed pieces that sowed nearly every field of intellectual interest with new and fruitful ideas. We find no masterpiece, but only thoughts for masterpieces; no creation, but a criticism with the quality to inspire and direct creation. He wrote plays — *Le Fils naturel* (1757) and *Le Père de famille* (1758) — and they are very insipid performances in the sentimental vein. But he accompanied them by essays on dramatic poetry, including especially the *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, in which he announced the principles of a new drama, — the serious, domestic, bourgeois drama of real life, in opposition to the stilted conventions of the classic French stage. It was Diderot’s lessons and example that gave a decisive bias to the dramatic taste of Lessing, whose plays, and his *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* (1768), mark so important an epoch in the history of the modern theatre. In the pictorial art, Diderot’s criticisms are no less rich, fertile and wide in their ideas. His article on “Beauty” in the *Encyclopaedia* shows that he had mastered and passed beyond the metaphysical theories on the subject, and the *Essai sur la peinture* was justly described by Goethe, who thought it worth translating, as “a magnificent work, which speaks even more helpfully to the poet than to the painter, though to the painter too it is as a blazing torch.” Diderot’s most intimate friend was Grimm, one of the conspicuous figures of the philosophic body. Grimm wrote news-letters to various high personages in Germany, reporting what was going on in the world of art and literature in Paris, then without a rival as the capital of the intellectual activity of Europe. Diderot helped his friend at one time and another between 1759 and 1779, by writing for him an account of the annual exhibitions of paintings. These *Salons* are among the most readable of all pieces of art criticism. They have a freshness, a reality, a life, which

take their readers into a different world from the dry and conceited pedantries of the ordinary virtuoso. As has been said by Sainte-Beuve, they initiated the French into a new sentiment, and introduced people to the mystery and purport of colour by ideas. “Before Diderot,” Madame Necker said, “I had never seen anything in pictures except dull and lifeless colours; it was his imagination that gave them relief and life, and it is almost a new sense for which I am indebted to his genius.”

Greuze was Diderot’s favourite among contemporary artists, and it is easy to see why. Greuze’s most characteristic pictures were the rendering in colour of the same sentiment of domestic virtue and the pathos of common life, which Diderot attempted with inferior success to represent upon the stage. For Diderot was above all things interested in the life of men, — not the abstract life of the race, but the incidents of individual character, the fortunes of a particular family, the relations of real and concrete motives in this or that special case. He delighted with the enthusiasm of a born casuist in curious puzzles of right and wrong, and in devising a conflict between the generalities of ethics and the conditions of an ingeniously contrived practical dilemma. Mostly his interest expressed itself in didactic and sympathetic form; in two, however, of the most remarkable of all his pieces, it is not sympathetic, but ironical. *Jacques le fataliste* (written in 1773, but not published until 1796) is in manner an imitation of *Tristram Shandy* and *The Sentimental Journey*. Few modern readers will find in it any true diversion. In spite of some excellent criticisms dispersed here and there, and in spite of one or two stories that are not without a certain effective realism, it must as a whole be pronounced savourless, forced, and as leaving unmoved those springs of laughter and of tears which are the common fountain of humour. *Le Neveu de Rameau* is a far superior performance. If there were any inevitable compulsion to name a masterpiece for Diderot, one must select this singular “farce-tragedy.” Its intention has been matter

of dispute; whether it was designed to be merely a satire on contemporary manners, or a reduction of the theory of self-interest to an absurdity, or the application of an ironical clincher to the ethics of ordinary convention, or a mere setting for a discussion about music, or a vigorous dramatic sketch of a parasite and a human original. There is no dispute as to its curious literary flavour, its mixed qualities of pungency, bitterness, pity and, in places, unflinching shamelessness. Goethe's translation (1805) was the first introduction of *Le Neveu de Rameau* to the European public. After executing it, he gave back the original French manuscript to Schiller, from whom he had it. No authentic French copy of it appeared until the writer had been nearly forty years in his grave (1823).

It would take several pages merely to contain the list of Diderot's miscellaneous pieces, from an infinitely graceful trifle like the *Regrets sur ma vieille robe de chambre* up to *Le Rêve de D'Alembert*, where he plunges into the depths of the controversy as to the ultimate constitution of matter and the meaning of life. It is a mistake to set down Diderot for a coherent and systematic materialist. We ought to look upon him "as a philosopher in whom all the contradictions of the time struggle with one another" (Rosenkranz). That is to say, he is critical and not dogmatic. There is no unity in Diderot, as there was in Voltaire or in Rousseau. Just as in cases of conduct he loves to make new ethical assumptions and argue them out as a professional sophist might have done, so in the speculative problems as to the organization of matter, the origin of life, the compatibility between physiological machinery and free will, he takes a certain standpoint, and follows it out more or less digressively to its consequences. He seizes a hypothesis and works it to its end, and this made him the inspirer in others of materialist doctrines which they held more definitely than he did. Just as Diderot could not attain to the concentration, the positiveness, the finality of aim needed for a masterpiece of literature, so he could not attain to those

qualities in the way of dogma and system. Yet he drew at last to the conclusions of materialism, and contributed many of its most declamatory pages to the *Système de la nature* of his friend D'Holbach, — the very Bible of atheism, as some one styled it. All that he saw, if we reduce his opinions to formulae, was motion in space: "attraction and repulsion, the only truth." If matter produces life by spontaneous generation, and if man has no alternative but to obey the compulsion of nature, what remains for God to do?

In proportion as these conclusions deepened in him, the more did Diderot turn for the hope of the race to virtue; in other words, to such a regulation of conduct and motive as shall make us tender, pitiful, simple, contented. Hence his one great literary passion, his enthusiasm for Richardson, the English novelist. Hence, also, his deepening aversion for the political system of France, which makes the realization of a natural and contented domestic life so hard. Diderot had almost as much to say against society as even Rousseau himself. The difference between them was that Rousseau was a fervent theist. The atheism of the Holbachians, as he called Diderot's group, was intolerable to him; and this feeling, aided by certain private perversities of humour, led to a breach of what had once been an intimate friendship between Rousseau and Diderot (1757). Diderot was still alive when Rousseau's *Confessions* appeared, and he was so exasperated by Rousseau's stories about Grimm, then and always Diderot's intimate, that in 1782 he transformed a life of Seneca, that he had written four years earlier, into an *Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron* (1778–1782), which is much less an account of Seneca than a vindication of Diderot and Grimm, and is one of the most rambling and inept productions in literature. As for the merits of the old quarrel between Rousseau and Diderot, we may agree with the latter, that too many sensible people would be in the wrong if Jean Jacques was in the right.

Varied and incessant as was Diderot's mental activity, it was not of a kind to bring him riches. He secured none of the posts that were occasionally given to needy men of letters; he could not even obtain that bare official recognition of merit which was implied by being chosen a member of the Academy. The time came for him to provide a dower for his daughter, and he saw no other alternative than to sell his library. When the empress Catherine of Russia heard of his straits, she commissioned an agent in Paris to buy the library at a price equal to about £1000 of English money, and then handsomely requested the philosopher to retain the books in Paris until she required them, and to constitute himself her librarian, with a yearly salary. In 1773 Diderot started on an expedition to thank his imperial benefactress in person, and he passed some months at St Petersburg. The empress received him cordially. The strange pair passed their afternoons in disputes on a thousand points of high philosophy, and they debated with a vivacity and freedom not usual in courts. "*Fi*, *donc*," said Catherine one day, when Diderot hinted that he argued with her at a disadvantage, "*is there any difference among men?*" Diderot returned home in 1774. Ten years remained to him, and he spent them in the industrious acquisition of new knowledge, in the composition of a host of fragmentary pieces, some of them mentioned above, and in luminous declamations with his friends. All accounts agree that Diderot was seen at his best in conversation. "He who only knows Diderot in his writings," says Marmontel, "does not know him at all. When he grew animated in talk, and allowed his thoughts to flow in all their abundance, then he became truly ravishing. In his writings he had not the art of ensemble; the first operation which orders and places everything was too slow and too painful to him." Diderot himself was conscious of the want of literary merit in his pieces. In truth he set no high value on what he had done. It is doubtful whether he was ever alive to the waste that circumstance and temperament together made of an intelligence

from which, if it had been free to work systematically, the world of thought had so much to hope. He was one of those simple, disinterested and intellectually sterling workers to whom their own personality is as nothing in presence of the vast subjects that engage the thoughts of their lives. He wrote what he found to write, and left the piece, as Carlyle has said, "on the waste of accident, with an ostrich-like indifference." When he heard one day that a collected edition of his works was in the press at Amsterdam, he greeted the news with "peals of laughter," so well did he know the haste and the little heed with which those works had been dashed off.

Diderot died on the 30th of July 1784, six years after Voltaire and Rousseau, one year after his old colleague D'Alembert, and five years before D'Holbach, his host and intimate for a lifetime. Notwithstanding Diderot's peals of laughter at the thought, an elaborate and exhaustive collection of his writings in twenty stout volumes, edited by MM. Assézat and Tourneux, was completed in 1875–1877.

Authorities. — Studies on Diderot by Scherer (1880); by E. Faguet (1890); by Sainte-Beuve in the *Causeries du lundi*; by F. Brunetière in the *Études critiques*, 2nd series, may be consulted. In English, Diderot has been the subject of a biography by John Morley [Viscount Morley of Blackburn] (1878). See also Karl Rosenkranz, *Diderots Leben und Werke* (1866). For a discussion of the authenticity of the posthumous works of Diderot see R. Dominic in the *Revue des deux mondes* (October 15, 1902).



The house where Diderot died: 39, rue de Richelieu, Paris 1st arr.



Monument to Denis Diderot in Paris, 6th arrondissement, by Jean Gautherin



The Church of Saint-Roch, a seventeenth century church in Paris — Diderot's final resting place. Diderot died of pulmonary thrombosis in Paris on 31 July 1784. He has several times been denied burial in the Panthéon with other French notables.



Interior of the church in 1855 — the location of the grave is unknown, as the body was displaced during French Revolution.